MONDAY, MAY 24, 2010, MELBOURNE CRICKET GROUND

QANTAS SOCCEROOS v NEW ZEALAND

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AUSTRALIA

ISSUE 17 $10

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The lowdown on tonight's visitor New Zealand

TAKING HEART
John van't Schip is excited about Melbourne's new team

BONUS 2010 FIFA WORLD CUP PREVIEW

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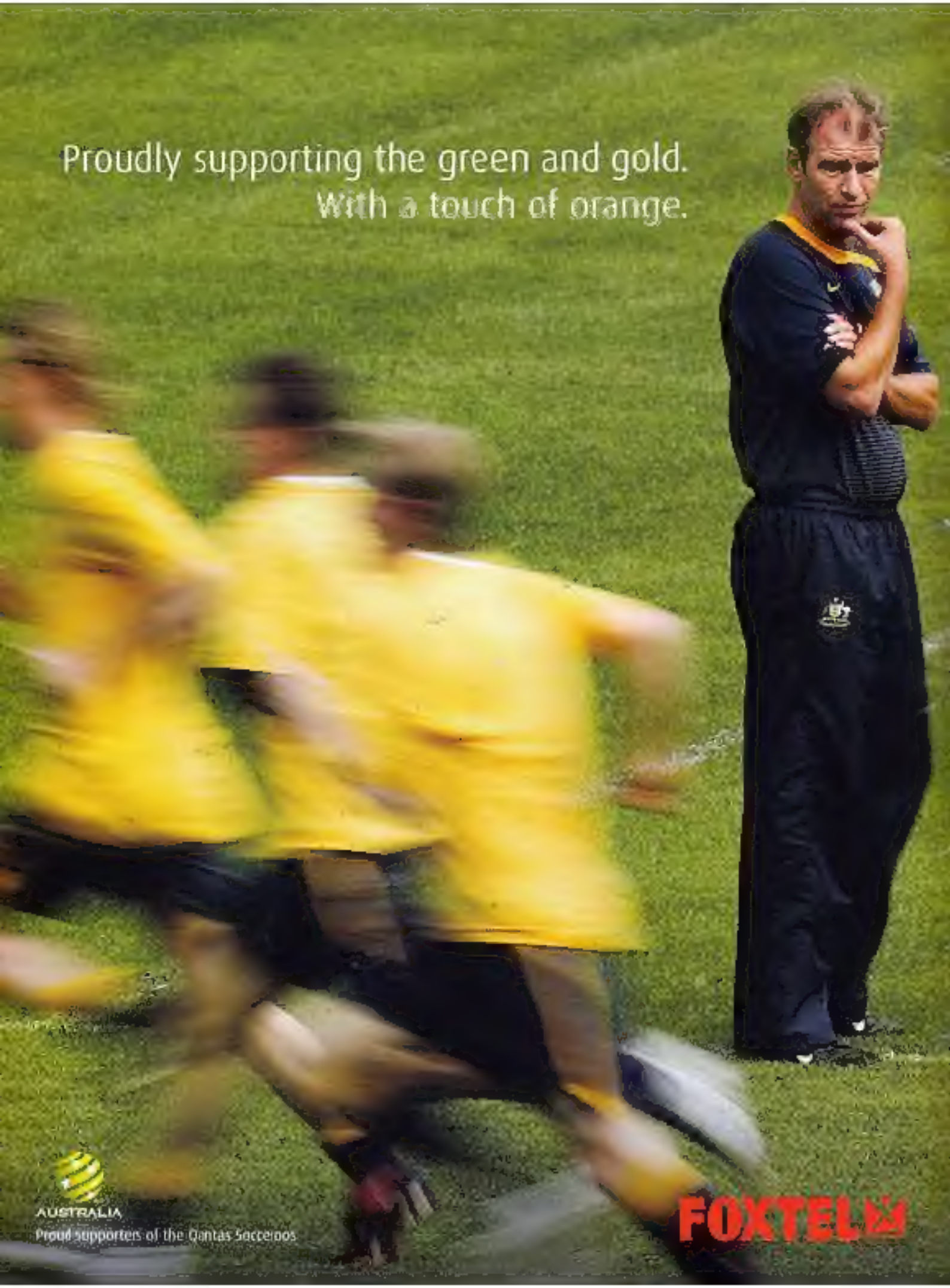
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Welcome New Zealand

FFA Chairman Frank Lowy AC

Expect the two neighbours to deliver a memorable match in Pim Verbeek's final game in charge on home soil.

Welcome to the Qantas Socceroos' farewell match against New Zealand here at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

In particular, I would like to welcome our very close friends from across the Tasman Sea for what will be our 63rd meeting.

Our two nations have a long and proud history in football. In fact, our first meeting was on June 17, 1922, and New Zealand was a 3-1 victor. Since then, we have had many memorable matches and tonight's fixture will definitely become one of them.

The Qantas Socceroos' qualification path to the 2010 FIFA World Cup has been an epic journey – our first in the Asian Football Confederation – that saw us travel the length and breadth of Asia to achieve our goal. But not only did we achieve our goal, it was also the manner in which we achieved it that matters most. All the players, coaching and support staff have done us proud with their courage and determination throughout the campaign, and all of Australia is grateful for your efforts.

It is also with some sorrow that tonight we farewell Pim Verbeek as he takes charge of his last match as head coach of the Qantas Socceroos on Australian soil. In the two and half years that Pim has been part of our national team, he has accomplished all challenges set in front of him, including qualifying for the 2010 FIFA World Cup and AFC Asian Cup 2011. We wish Pim and his family all the best for his next challenge in Morocco following the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

Recently at FIFA headquarters in Zurich, on behalf of Australia, I submitted our formal documentation, 'the Bid Book', as part of our campaign to host the 2018 or 2022 FIFA World Cup in Australia. We believe we have submitted a technically brilliant bid supported by unified government funding and commitment at all levels.

Our nationwide hosting proposal means millions of sports fans across Australia may one day be able to enjoy the biggest and most exciting sporting event in the world in wonderful, new or upgraded stadiums in their own cities.

In closing I would like to thank all our partners for their ongoing support, especially in relation to tonight's match.

My best wishes to both teams for what I am sure will be a competitive and enjoyable match for all, and also all the best for both teams when they compete at the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa.

FRANK LOWY AC, CHAIRMAN
FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA

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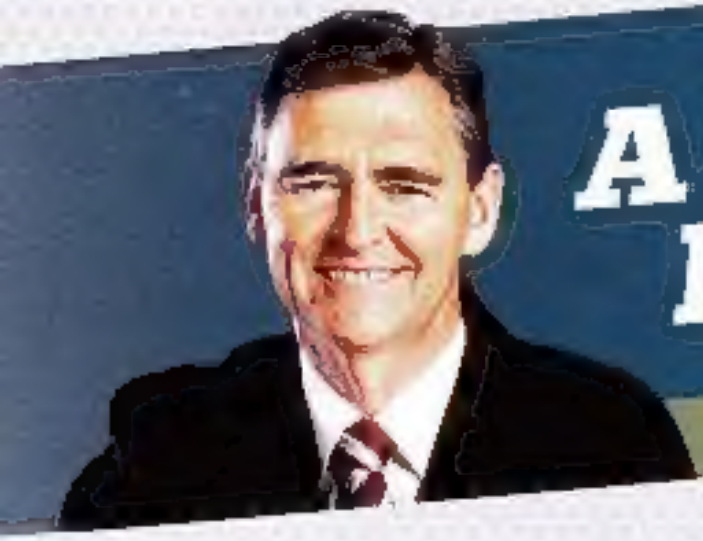

A Fitting Farewell

Hon John Brumby MP

Tonight's match provides an excellent opportunity to farewell the Qantas Socceroos and watch a great spectacle.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the sporting capital of Australia for the official farewell match between Australia and New Zealand.

I would like to thank the New Zealand team for coming over for what should be a great night of football. For those who have come from interstate or from across the Tasman, welcome to Melbourne and to Victoria.

Melbourne is home to a myriad of entertainment options, so make sure you make the most of your time here. I encourage you to take advantage of our fantastic shopping, dining and entertainment precincts, as well as our spectacular sites.

The Victorian Government is a strong supporter of sports and of major sporting events, and has demonstrated this commitment through investment in sports facilities and in bringing great events to Victoria.

We are committed to the development of all codes of football in Victoria. This is why we have invested in a new rectangular pitch for Melbourne (AAMI Park), and have strongly supported Football Federation Australia's bid to bring the FIFA World Cup to Australia.

While the match tonight will be an excellent opportunity to see off the Qantas Socceroos, it will also give Australians a chance to thank coach Pim Verbeek as he takes charge of the team for the last time on home soil. I wish Pim and the Qantas Socceroos every success in the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

On behalf of the Victorian Government, I wish everyone a memorable match and wish both teams the best of luck tonight and in South Africa.

HON JOHN BRUMBY MP
PREMIER OF VICTORIA

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KICK OFF

The latest Australian football news at home and abroad.

FOOTBALL FOR HOPE
A team from Football United will represent Australia in South Africa's 'Football for Hope' tournament.

Football Matters

Latest news from inside the FFA.

FOOTBALL UNITED

Cheer on the second Australian team in South Africa. A team from Football United will represent Australia at the first ever Football for Hope' tournament during the final week of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa.

Introduced by FIFA, 'Football for Hope' brings together 32 countries that represent the power of football for positive social change.

The Australian team represents refugees from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, South America, the Pacific, and Australia.

If you'd like to help Football United raise funds to send its team to South Africa, please donate at *footballunited.org.au*.

Football United is an initiative from the University of New South Wales – a program that uses the power of football to help improve social cohesion and harmony in communities with high proportions of refugees, immigrants and indigenous people.

QANTAS SOCCEROOS MANDARINS

In a first for the Qantas Socceroos and for Australia's largest packer of mandarins – Gayndah Packers Co-operative Ltd – Socceroos mandarins are now in store.

To get into the fun, simply visit participating greengrocers or Coles supermarkets and bag yourself some Socceroos mandarins. By doing so, you could go into the draw to win the Ultimate Hyundai A-League Match Day Experience or a Socceroos fan pack every day.

To be in the running, all you need to do is purchase a 1kg bag of Socceroos mandarins from participating greengrocers or Coles supermarkets from now until July 5, 2010, complete the entry form and send it in with your proof of purchase.

For stockists, more competition information, delicious mandarin recipes and much more, visit citrusforfitness.com.au.

1GOAL – EDUCATION FOR ALL

The '1GOAL – Education for All' campaign, the official partner of FIFA and the 2010 FIFA World Cup, is working with football fans, teams and players to leave a lasting legacy from the first African FIFA World Cup by ensuring all children can get an education.

Currently, about 72 million children, the majority of them in Africa, do not have access to an education.

World-renowned footballers have signed up to support 1GOAL, including Qantas Socceroos Tim Cahill, Vincenzo Grella, Brett Emerton, John Aloisi and the Westfield Matildas, as well as players from Adelaide United. They join global stars Rio Ferdinand, Thierry Henry, Michael Essien and Zinedine Zidane.

The 1GOAL team in Australia is working to sign up millions of football fans to support the call for better aid funding for education. To add your signature in support of 1GOAL, please visit *joinagoal.org.au* or *Joinagoal.org*.

I TOLD YOU SO

Football fever has come to the National Museum of Australia in Canberra. To coincide with the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the National Museum pays tribute to Australian football legend Johnny Warren and takes a look into the evolution of the world game of football in Australia.

Warren was a captain, coach, commentator and champion of football in Australia. In the 50 years he was associated with the game, it evolved into a mainstream sport in Australia and is a part of the nation's sporting identity.

Come to the National Museum, from May 15-August 9, to find out why Warren once said these famous words: "I told you so."

SHOWING SUPPORT Australian star John Aloisi has joined the '1Goal – Education for All' campaign.

FIFA FAN FEST

From June 11-July 12, Sydney's Darling Harbour will be transformed with football fever. From daily entertainment, displays, interactive activities and match replays on the giant screens to nightly concerts and the excitement of live broadcast matches, there'll be something for everyone to enjoy.

Huge screens in Cockle Bay and Tumbalong Park will show all 64 matches of the 2010 FIFA World Cup live, so show support for your national team by cheering it on and catch all the action of the world's best football in this fantastic harbour setting.

With a family-friendly environment and something to appeal to everyone, there's no better place to share in the celebration of football and the world game.

Check out what's on at Sydney International FIFA Fan Fest at *sydneyfifafanfest.com.au*

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News Bites

What's been making headlines on and off the field since last issue.

TOFFEES ON TOUR

Everton will be the latest English Premiership side to visit Australian shores when it arrives on a pre-season tour in July.

That means, depending how the Qantas Socceroos fare at the 2010 FIFA World Cup, Australian fans could get the chance to see Tim Cahill in action for his club side.

The Toffees will kick off their three-match tour against Brisbane Roar at Suncorp Stadium on July 10, then fly south to Victoria to face Melbourne Heart at Etihad Stadium on July 14, before finishing against Sydney FC at AHZ Stadium on July 17.

It will be the Toffees' first trip to Australia since 1987.

"I think it's fantastic for Australian football and also Everton because Australia's got a massive following of Everton supporters," Cahill said on *evertonfc.com*.

"They're a proud following and I think for a Premier League team like Everton to grace the shores of Australia is absolutely massive."

NATIONAL ANTHEM

Rogue Traders' anthem for the Qantas Socceroos, *Hearts Beat as One*, will be available for download from today. The track features up to 100 heartbeats from Australians who donated their heartbeats at the Westfield Pulse of the Nation events held at Westfield centres nationally in May.

The names of all Australians who donated their heartbeats for the *Hearts Beat as One* track will be presented in a commemorative book to the Qantas Socceroos at the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa.

RED ALERT
Lucas Pantelis in action for Adelaide United in the AFC Champions League.

BOOKED IN

Football Federation Australia submitted Australia's Bid Book at FIFA Headquarters in Zurich, Switzerland on May 14.

The Bid Book, detailing Australia's pitch to FIFA to host either the 2018 or 2022 FIFA World Cup, was presented to FIFA President Sepp Blatter by FFA Chairman Frank Lowy, AC, Australian Federal Sports Minister Kate Ellis and FFA Chief Executive Officer Ben Buckley.

Australia's proposal details plans for three new stadiums and upgrades to nine others – making it the country's biggest single sporting infrastructure investment project outside of the Sydney Olympics.

Lowy said the presentation to FIFA was an exciting milestone in Australia's history.

"We are proud to present to FIFA our bid documents, highlighting a technically brilliant bid supported by unified government funding and commitment at all levels," he said.

The FIFA Executive Committee will make a decision on the hosts for the FIFA World Cup in 2018 and 2022 on December 2, 2010.

MIXED FORTUNES

While Melbourne Victory crashed out of the group stages of the AFC Champions League 2010 for the second time in three years, Adelaide United once again showed its Victorian rival how it was done.

The Reds may have finished last in the Hyundai A-League 2009/10 season, but they looked a different team against Asian opposition, advancing to the knockout stages with a game to spare. A win over Pohang Steelers was followed by victories against Sanfrecce Hiroshima and Shandong Luneng, before a goalless draw away to the Steelers – thanks to some Eugene Galekovic heroics – sealed their progress.

However, despite topping their group and sealing a home tie in the round of 16, the Reds failed to advance any further, going down 3-2 to Jeonbuk Motors from Korea Republic in extra time.

There was no such luck for the Victory, which all but ruined its qualification hopes when it slumped to defeat in the first three games. A 1-0 win against Japanese side Kawasaki Frontale kept Melbourne's hopes alive but, after Ernie Merrick's men could only draw 0-0 at home to Beijing Guoan, their fate was sealed.

TRADING PLACES

No sooner had Sydney FC collected its second Hyundai A-League premiership than all the clubs started putting preparations in place for the 2010/11 season.

Melbourne Heart continued to build its squad for its debut season, with John Aloisi and Simon Colosimo joining former Sydney FC teammate Clint Bolton at the new franchise.

Newcastle and Central Coast have also been busy, with the Jets signing New Zealand international Jeremy Brockie and former Qantas Socceroos Kasey Wehrman and Ruben Zadkovich. New Mariners coach Graham Arnold has recruited defensive duo Sam Gallagher and Trent Sainsbury, as well as Rostyn Griffiths from North Queensland Fury.

Also leaving the Fury was coach Ian Ferguson, who moved across the country to become assistant coach of Perth Glory. He was joined by his star player in North Queensland, Robbie Fowler, with the former Liverpool great becoming the Glory's second marquee player.

COMING HOME
Tim Cahill and Everton will be touring Australia in July.

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PLAY TO BE REMEMBERED
LUCAS NEILL / 2021
WRITE THE FUTURE

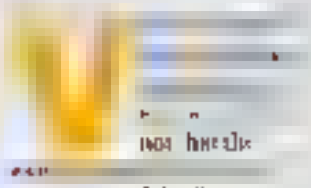
MA
TH

EYES ON THE PRIZE
Vincenzo Grella is hungry for FIFA World Cup glory.

AN IN
E MIDDLE

As the holding midfielder for the Qantas Socceroos, Vincenzo Grella is crucial to Australia's chances tonight, and in South Africa.

BY [redacted]



[redacted] has the

a mainstay of the Qantas Socceroos' starting line-up, is one to blow his own trumpet.

The tough-tackling, tactically astute midfi[redacted]

the talking. Always has, right from the days nearly 20 years ago when, as a junior with south-east Melbourne team Springvale City, he began to attract the attention of coaches

he and [redacted]

You only had to see the easy self-assuredness with which [redacted]

as Socceroos squad [redacted] for his debut in February [redacted]

(coincidentally, the match in which Wayne Rooney also made his international debut) when [redacted]

and into the home lobby in Whitham Abbey, north-east [redacted]

Bag slung over his shoulder, blond hair spiked and tousled [redacted]

group of senior men present – including the likes of Mark Viduka and national captain Paul Okon – and dedicated with a smile. "We was robbed [redacted] they always get a penalty. They always get looked after. How can it be? Always a [redacted]

At that [redacted]

was playing in Italy's Serie A for the small town Tuscan [redacted]

lifelong friend Mark Bresciano, another Melbourne-born Qantas Socceroo with a similar [redacted]

The duo were making their names in one of the toughest leagues in the world, establishing themselves as two youngsters (Bresci[redacted] had made his debut 18 months earlier in the FIFA Confederations Cup in Korea

Republic and Japan) who had the ability to become key figures in Australia's pursuit of FIFA World Cup glory.

Grella's humour and straightforward manner can be prepared to take a backhanded swipe at officialdom and feed the endless conspiracy theories that surround Italian football. Empoli had just been beaten by a controversial late spot kick by the perennial Serie A champion) quickly endeared him to his teammates.

Not that he was taking anything for granted. He knew that he had to earn a place already for Australia's blue and he was well aware that hard work and consistency were the only things that were going to win him what he coveted most – a regular spot in the national team's starting line-up alongside his great mate Bresciano.

"I have always dreamt of it. But it's not as if I have turned up today and I am a superstar," Grella said in an interview with *The Age* at that time.

"I know my limits. I know that I have never been a super, super player. I am not scared to say I was not a personal midfielder. But I have always had the hunger and I have never let my strengths or morals or any other stuff that goes on behind soccer go as the way of my dreams."

That interview took place seven years ago at that time Youth, in Abbey mode, and it would not be characteristically Grella to go in today as it could those years ago.

Grella is still, refreshingly, absent of the spin and meaningless chatter that so many in the game now adopt as a default media persona.

Asked a straightforward question, he is always going to provide a straightforward answer, one that usually gives an insight into how a player's mind is looking at things and what's happening for her.

After the Qantas Socceroos' controversial last-minute exit in the 2006 FIFA World Cup, when a last-minute penalty converted by Francesco Totti gave the Azzurri a narrow victory, their next game was a predictable anti-climax, disappointment on the camp quickly accompanied by a sense of grievance, a feeling of being hard done by.

Grella was as disappointed as his teammates, but was quick to put it all in perspective. In the mixed zone, where journalists mingle with the players straight after the game, he was prepared to concede that no matter how disappointing the manner of Australia's defeat had been, reality had to be accepted.

"We weren't good enough to beat a team that ended with ten men [as the ejected Italian defender Marco Materazzi's dismissal for a brawl on the pitch] but we lost with little animosity.

Grella is fastidious about his diet and the way he prepares, both physically and mentally, for a match.

"You have to give it to them. I play against these players every week in the Serie A and we are very good friends. If I had enough in reserve to keep us from scoring and, even with a man down, were attacking our penalty area in the last minute [of extra time], that means we were not good enough."

It's that measured calm lack of bluster that wins Grella so many admirers in the coaching fraternity among fans and experienced football writers.

A dedicated professional, someone who trains hard and looks after himself properly, he is fastidious about his diet and the way he prepares, both physically and mentally, for a match. Some can be jaded enough to take an instrumental view of a situation. He does not panic and will always try to work out the best solution, both for himself and the team.

Perhaps that phlegmatic approach is what is required for a person who plays an often unglamorous but pivotal position – the holding midfielder role.

Neither a defender nor an attacker, not quite a full-blown creator but not a total negator either, the screening midfielder has to have a deep understanding of the rhythms and flow of a game and the ability to dictate pass to orchestrate the team's approach at crucial points of a match.

Like Bresciano, Grella began his career in the National Soccer League with Carlton with the pair playing in the team's grand final loss to South Melbourne.

But it was his move to Italy initially to Empoli in Serie B which made him as a player, in a decade in the country of his parents, in the main known for Empoli, Torino, Parma and Torino before moving, just before the start of the 2008-09 English Premiership season, to Blackburn Rovers.

Along the way he met the girl who would become his wife Barbara, when she was working in a local shoe shop in Empoli. The pair now have two daughters, Sophia and Sophie, a family which Grella credits with giving him a grounded view of life and puts the trials and tribulations at the highest levels of football in perspective.

Tonight, Grella gets to run out on to the Melbourne turf in the highest regard of his life, as is not something he imagined he might do when he was young, as he was never

going to become an Australian Rules player but he has fond memories of matches against the likes of Greece, Argentina and Japan at the great stadium.

"I went to watch cricket and footy there as a young boy and have been to the grand final many times and have also played there a few times now," he said.

"It's a really special stadium, even if you are not from Melbourne. It represents everything there is about stadiums in this country.

"Being in the changing rooms there is always special. In the dressing rooms, they have a board up and it shows all the players and their performances for the Australian cricket team. It goes back a long, long time and it just shows you how historic that stadium is, and what a memorable place it is.

The farewell game – four years ago Australia took on reigning European champion Greece in the equivalent fixture – is an important occasion, Grella believes.

"I really like the concept of the farewell game for us. It's important to us, it gives us the chance to connect with the fans before we leave and it will be a great show for them," he said.

"Last time we beat Greece when Josip Skoko scored that great goal, so we hope we can get a good result and a result against New Zealand this time.

"I recall it was a little bit of a shock to see Greece in Australia [as the] European champions, but for us as players it's always a great challenge to play against the best players in the world. That's what we want to do.

"We've had a couple of years of preparation and we've had a few friendlies and we've been working hard to get here and we are all looking forward very much to the challenge.

"The expectation level is higher this time around, of course because of what we achieved last time. The general public seems to think we can get through the group without sweating, but it's not like that.

"The reality is that we have a very difficult group. Germany is always a powerful team in every World Cup. Ghana has a lot of really good players and Serbia is also a good team. We are going to have to play at our absolute best to get through.

"I think it is harder than last time. No disrespect to Japan, but Ghana is probably a stronger team.

"We have got more players playing in the top competitions in Europe. Germany is Germany. They are a superpower in international football, they always get through or at least the group stage.

"We've been grouped with two European qualifiers and a tough group which is not an easy thing to do.

"Our main dream is to emulate the efforts of the Australian team that went to the semi-finals [in 2006]. We've got a very young squad and a lot of players have had experience of playing in the Asian Cup and World Cup qualifiers. We've had a good build-up, we've had a couple of friendlies and we've been training well.

"We've got a chance to go through the group and hopefully we can get a lot of people behind us and get them excited about where we may end up," he said

THE NEGATOR
Grella hunts down Liverpool's Steven Gerrard

"I have had a succession of small muscle injuries that are reoccurring. Why it's been happening on a regular basis, I don't know, but it's certainly very frustrating, especially when you can't do anything about it.

"I keep putting in all the work and doing everything right, but not to be able to play on a regular basis for me is so frustrating. I could accept it if wasn't playing, if I was fit and was being left out of the team for not being good enough, but that's not the case. I can't play because of this series of niggling injuries and it's very maddening."

In recent times, there have been stories linking Grella with a move away from Blackburn, but the midfielder still has plenty of time left on his contract and says he is more concerned about getting fit and showing the club's loyal supporters what he can do, and why Paul Ince – the Blackburn coach at the time he was bought for £4 million – brought him to the club.

"I still have two years left on my contract. I have not sat down with the manager (Sam Allardyce) to discuss things or what I am going to do. I told him I was going to come back here to Australia, make sure I was fit, go to the World Cup and do the best I could. He was very good about it, he wished us well," Grella said.

"In the last couple of years with the injury and the poor performances at club level, the last thing I want is to leave Blackburn without having shown them my potential. The fans don't really know how good I am or how well I can play.

"They don't say Grella is no good, they say he is always injured," and as I said, that's very frustrating for me.

"I have had some great games there, but I have not been able to string enough of them together."

With his unfinished business at Rovers and an italian wife and daughters, the odds of Grella coming home and finishing his playing career in the Hyundai A-League seem quite long. Even if he sees out his contract at Blackburn, he will be 32, and it's likely he will finish his career in Italy rather than Australia.

Grella, more than most of his teammates, comes across as someone who might become a successful coach. With his smart game sense, the respect he would command from having played at the highest levels, honesty and leadership qualities (he has captained his country – albeit in a friendly international), he has all the qualities needed.

But that's all in the future. Right now, he says, "I just want to be as fit as I can be, as well prepared as possible and just focus on the World Cup. We did well last time, and it would be fantastic to do even better this time."

Michael Lynch is chief football writer at The Age. He will be covering the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa for Fox Sports.

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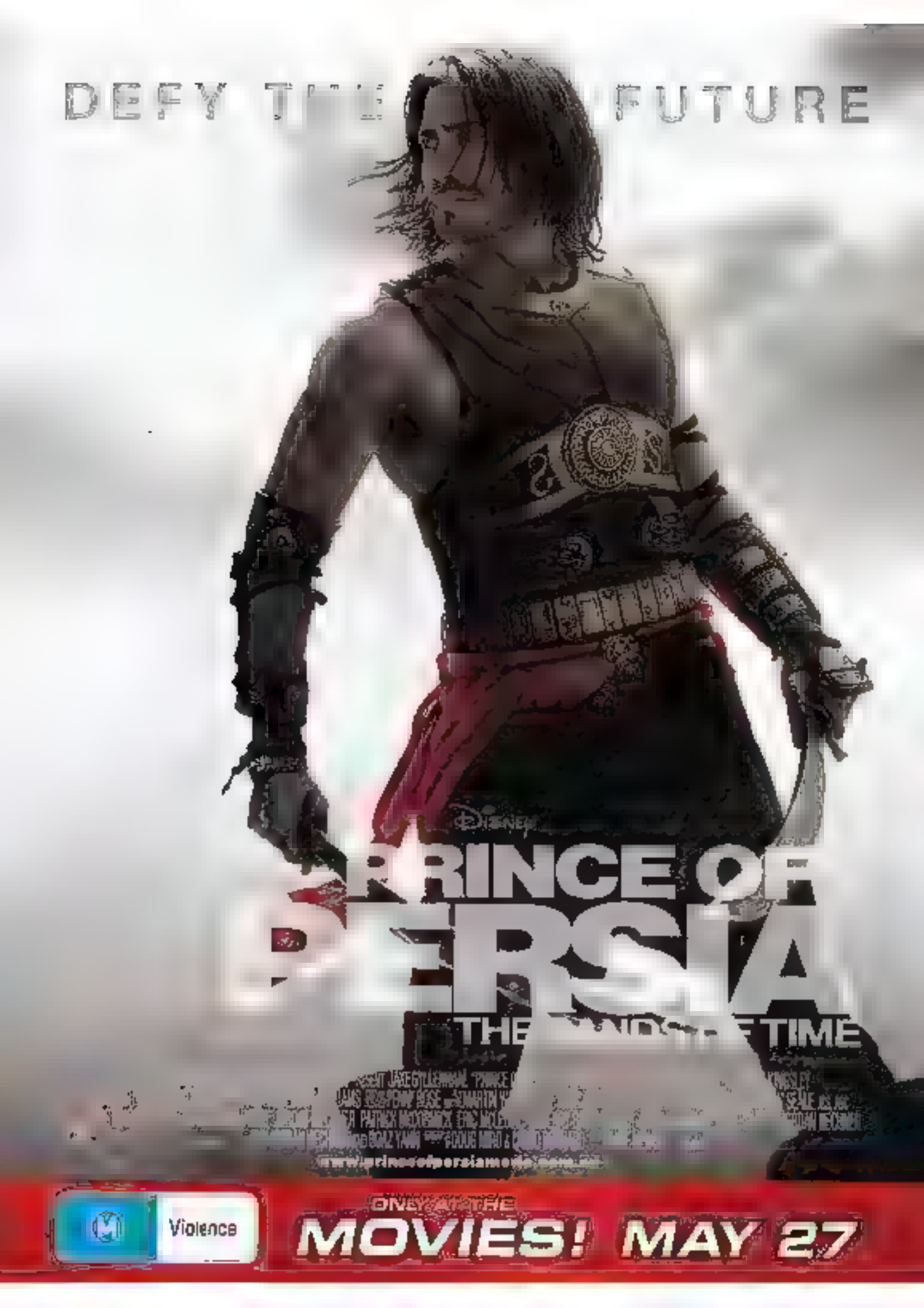
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2010 FIFA WORLD CUP PREVIEW

AFRICAN ADVENTURE

Ten years after losing out to Germany in the bidding war, South Africa finally gets its chance to host a FIFA World Cup. It should be worth the wait.

The wait is almost over. The first FIFA World Cup to be staged in Africa will begin in 18 days – and you can hit the whole of South Africa in counting down the minutes, probably even the seconds.

For South Africans, it is the culmination of a mammoth journey, one that began many years before the world football body announced in May 2004 that Africa's most southerly country would host the 2010 tournament. That decision sparked the usual scenes of celebration on the streets of Durban, Johannesburg and all over the nation after Danny Jordaan's bid team had beaten Morocco and Egypt in the final round of voting.

Yet for many South Africans, it was merely atonement for what they believed should have been theirs four years earlier.

July 7, 2000 was a dark day in the history of South African sport. Heavily favoured to win the rights to host the 2006 FIFA World Cup, South Africa lost to Germany by a single vote, a decision that prompted a global backlash at the fact that Europe would again host the sporting world's biggest tournament, at the expense of an untried Africa.

Germany proved any doubters wrong and staged a hugely successful competition in 2006, one of the best FIFA World Cups. But the Germans have had their month in the sun.

Now, almost 10 years on from that heartbreaking day in July, Africa's time has arrived.

The four-week tournament that kicks off when South Africa plays Mexico at midnight on June 12 (Australian Eastern Standard Time) is the final phase in a competition that truly warrants its global tag. No fewer than 204 countries entered the 2010 FIFA World Cup preliminary qualifying phase in March 2007. Bhutan became the 205th nation when its late registration was accepted.

Countries competed in six different confederations, with only the hosts and the cup-holder – Italy – guaranteed automatic qualification. The first qualifier was played in August 2007 – just 18 months on from when Pablo Cannavaro hoisted the 18-carat gold FIFA World Cup above his head at Berlin's Olympiastadion – and nations from Asia, Africa, Europe, Oceania, South America and North, Central America and the Caribbean were still battling it out more than two years later.

FIRST OF: Local fans will produce a carnival atmosphere in South Africa.

QANTAS SOCCEROOS PRELIMINARY SQUAD

Pim Verbeek informed before with Lucas Neill announced a 30-man preliminary squad for the 2010 FIFA World Cup on May 11. A final squad of 23 will be confirmed by June 1. For profiles of the Australian squad, see page 36.

GOALKEEPERS

Adam Federici
Eugene Galekovic
Rodney Jones
Mark Schwarzer

DEFENDERS

Michael Beauchamp
David Carney
Scott Chipperfield
Vince Lisoty
Mark Milligan
Craig Moore
Lucas Neill
Jade North
Luke Wilkshire
Rhys Williams

MIDFIELDERS

Mark Bresciano
Tim Cahill
Nick Carle
Jason Culina
Brett Emerton
Richard Garcia
Vincenzo Grella
James Holland
Brett Holman
Mile Jedinak
Tommy Oar
Carl Valeri
Mario Vrkic

FORWARDS

Scott McDonald
Danny Vukovic
David Zdrilic

Groupsure – which played the all-guy to Australia and what Australian glorious night in Stuttgart up there – was the 32nd nation to book its spot in South Africa, squeezing past Costa Rica in a tense two-legged play-off.

That wasn't quite the end of qualification matters, however. Despite Republic of Ireland fans playing their hearts out in Paris, with the hand of Thierry Henry being replaced that led to Ireland's Aaron Lennon and him, ultimately, a bid to be the first representative of South Africa but nothing came of it.

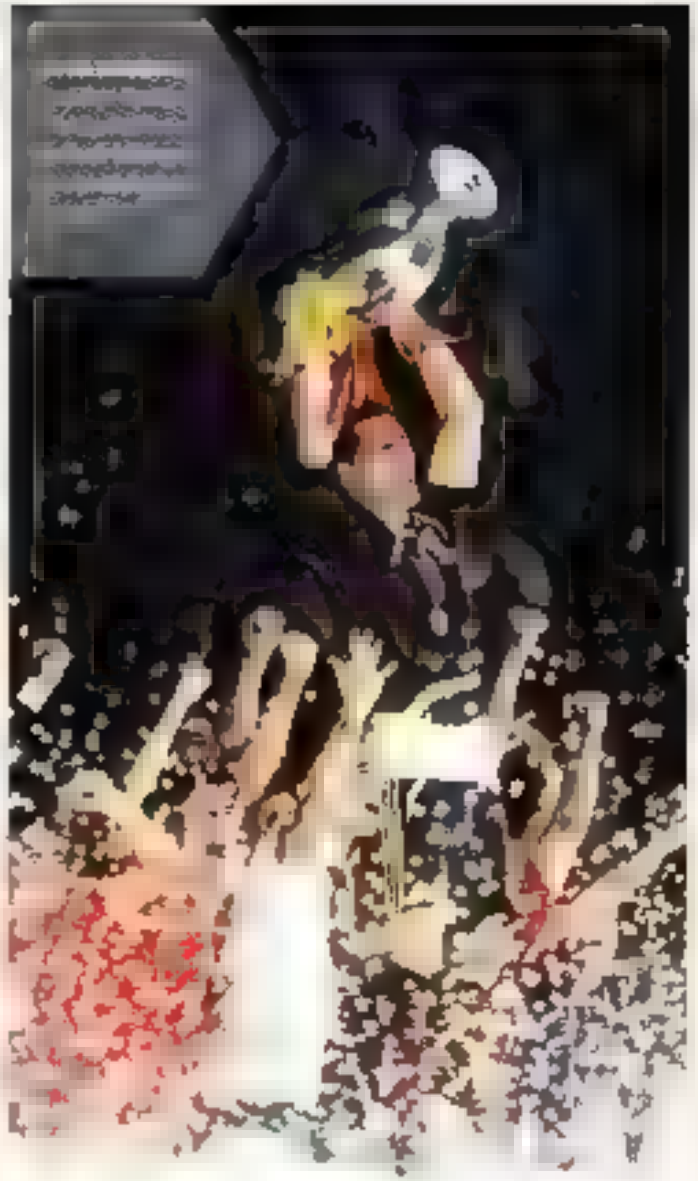
A couple of weeks later, the draw for the finals was held in Cape Town with all the glitz, glamour and host of celebrities where one would expect. David Beckham, Diego Maradona and Nelson Mandela – we have become accustomed to all these events.

But after seven years of teasing, delays and announced finals, it was time to focus on South Africa.

It goes without saying that the 2010 FIFA World Cup will be the biggest sporting event in African history. South Africa has previously hosted the rugby World Cup – won, and cricket World Cup – loss, but both of those tournaments pale in comparison to this, and much bigger football events.

The projected ticket sale numbers give an insight into just how big it is. The total estimated television audience for the tournament is a staggering 26 billion, spread over 204 nations. Because the match start times – how lovely, you'll have a minimum of 15 games at every game. What's more, it will show nearly 3,000 hours of coverage.

The organisers of Euro will be hoping to attract fans from the 32 participating countries to their native countries, but there'll be an obvious surge of supporters in South Africa. It's presumed that 300,000 people will visit the country during the tournament – many of them arriving up have on the day where their countries will play one or more games.



And then there's the media pack. Without doubt, the tournament will be Africa's largest media event, with more than 20,000 journalists granted accreditation.

Media aside, not everyone will be able to get a ticket. England's contingent of soldiers were not given their numbers expected to make the trip, but how will they have the cheek to be in a final. The 64 games in the 2010 World Cup will be played at 10 stadiums in nine different cities, and six of these venues are either new or have recently been renovated.

Most spectacular of all is Soccer City Stadium in Johannesburg, where the tournament will begin and end. The stadium, FNB Stadium, was the home of South African football for many years and is situated near the Nasrec Road overpass in Soweto. In addition to hosting numerous international matches, it also staged many of the world-famous concerts such as Nelson Mandela's 70th birthday celebration following his release in 1990.

With the tournament's opening ceremony in Soweto, some of it's age is more than a year away. It will be a thrilling venue for the tournament's finale.

All the best of luck to South African fans would be more than even will be there in the stadium – especially as the rounds – and hopefully many of their nations. The Bafana Bafana remained as the boys' appeal were, on paper, and have few stars on the squad

France looms as a formidable opponent while the other Group A teams – Mexico, Uruguay and hosts South Africa – will be hoping to pick up points from each other. The Mexicans have a good record in the World Cup finals and will expect to progress, while Uruguay have a number of players with experience of playing in Europe's top leagues. South Africa, as the lowest-ranked team in the tournament, will be looking to gain their first World Cup victory in front of their own fans.

Group B looks more open and Argentina, Nigeria, South Korea and Greece will all be confident of advancing to the knockout phase. Argentina have a number of players with experience of playing in Europe's top leagues, including Lionel Messi, Carlos Tevez and Javier Mascherano, who will be looking to get their campaign off to a winning start against Nigeria on June 12. Diego Maradona's men will be favourites to top the group, but they will be wary of Nigeria's physical approach and pace on the counter-attack. Greece, who won a surprise victory at Euro 2004, will be hoping to repeat the feat, while South Korea will be looking to their captain Park Ji-Sung, who plays for Manchester United, to lead them out of the group.

Group C is probably the most open of the eight groups, with no clear favourites. Defending champions Italy will be looking to get their campaign off to a winning start against Paraguay on June 14, while Slovakia will be hoping to cause an upset against New Zealand on June 15. Italy have a number of players who are past their best, but they have an outside chance of making it through the group.

England and Australia should top Group D, although Serbia and Ghana, the Group B runners-up at the 2006 World Cup, will be confident of causing an upset. England will be looking to get their campaign off to a winning start against the United States on June 12, while Australia will be hoping to cause an upset against Germany on June 13. Ghana, the Group B runners-up at the 2006 World Cup, will be confident of causing an upset.

Group E looks the most open of the eight groups, with no clear favourites. Holland, Cameroon, Denmark and Japan will be looking to get their campaigns off to a winning start against Holland on June 14, while Cameroon will be looking to cause an upset against Denmark on June 15. Holland will be favourites to top the group, but they will be wary of Cameroon's physical approach and pace on the counter-attack. Denmark, who won a surprise victory at Euro 2004, will be hoping to repeat the feat, while Japan will be looking to their captain Keisuke Honda, who plays for CSKA Moscow, to lead them out of the group.

On the home front, Australia faces a significant challenge to [illegible] the [illegible] of their [illegible] as the [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

THE OPPOSITION

Everything you need to know about Australia's Group D opponents.

WORLD BEATER Michael Essien is the driving force of a rising Ghana side.

GERMANY

If history is anything to go by, Germany is a certainty to advance from Group D. Put simply, the Germans are qualification specialists. They have qualified for every FIFA World Cup they've been eligible to enter and, once there, have never exited before the quarter-final stage.

A three-time winner and four-time runner-up, Germany's dream of a home soil triumph was denied by Italy in a thrilling semi-final in 2006. Two years later Joachim Low's men came even closer to winning a trophy, losing to Spain in the Euro 2008 final.

Germany strolled through qualification unbeaten with eight wins and two draws, sealing its spot in South Africa with an impressive 3-0 win away to Russia.

The loss of inspirational leader Michael Ballack to an ankle injury on the eve of the tournament rocked the squad and, on paper, the team doesn't appear as strong as in previous years, but can you ever discount the Germans?

FIFA WORLD RANKING: 5

LAST TIME OUT: Semi-final

DANGER MAN: Mesut Özil. He might only be 21 and have just a handful of caps, but Özil is the most exciting thing in German football at the moment. The Werder Bremen midfielder should provide his team's creative drive, especially in the absence of Michael Ballack, and is also a danger on the wing.

GHANA

The first African team to qualify for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, Ghana did the continent proud four years ago when it reached the last 16, and pushed Brazil all the way in a right struggle before eventually succumbing 3-0.

Chelsea's Michael Essien and Inter Milan's Sulley Muntari are the elite duo of the Black Stars squad and, together with captain Stephen Appiah, they form a formidable mid in midfield. English Premiership fans meanwhile will be familiar with defender John Paintsil and goalkeeper Richard Kingson.

The big names aside, Ghana has a host of young talent at its disposal – Ghana is the reigning FIFA under-20 World Cup champion after beating Brazil in the final last October.

Ghana was one of only three African countries to advance from the group phase in the 2006 FIFA World Cup, and will fancy its chances of being the continent's best performer again.

FIFA WORLD RANKING: 32

LAST TIME OUT: Round of 16

DANGER MAN: Michael Essien. One of the genuine stars of the English Premiership, Essien was forced to sit on the sidelines for much of Chelsea's title winning campaign due to a troublesome knee. A versatile midfielder with a tremendous engine, he often scores spectacular goals. Ghanaian fans will be praying for his fitness.

SERBIA

There are few certainties in football, but Serbia will surely fare better at South Africa than it did in Germany four years ago. Then, competing as Serbia and Montenegro, the country lost all three group games, including a 6-0 humiliation at the hands of Argentina.

That was the last time Serbia and Montenegro joined forces as Serbia declared its independence that same year.

Four years on, with Bolton Town favourite Radi Antic in charge as coach, the Serbs are a far stronger outfit, with an emphasis on attack. Standard Liege star Milan Jovanovic is the main man up front. He scored five goals in qualifying and is a threat from dead-ball situations.

Serbia caught the attention of the rest of Europe by qualifying for South Africa ahead of France, securing first place in the group with a 6-0 thrashing of Romania. That result outweighed the French in the infamous 'Hand of Henry' play-off against the Republic of Ireland.

FIFA WORLD RANKING: 18

LAST TIME OUT: Group phase

DANGER MAN: Nemanja Vidic. If Australia is to get a result against Serbia, it must find a way past Vidic first. Dominant in the air and a ferocious tackler, the centre back has been a key figure in Manchester United's success in the past few years, and was the English Premiership's 2008/09 Player of the Season.

MEET
TIM CAHILL
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TIM CAHILL:
THE UNSEEN JOURNEY
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Tuesday 25th May
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Melbourne CBD
PG
Mild themes and infrequent coarse language
JB HI-FI
ALWAYS CHEAPEST PRICES

THE VENUES

The 64 matches of the 2010 FIFA World Cup will be played at 10 different venues across South Africa.

GREEN POINT STADIUM

CITY: Cape Town

CAPACITY: 66,005

LOOK OUT FOR: Semi-final July 7

DURBAN STADIUM

CITY: Durban

CAPACITY: 69,957

LOOK OUT FOR: Germany v Australia, June 14

ELLIS PARK STADIUM

CITY: Johannesburg

CAPACITY: 61,639

LOOK OUT FOR: Brazil v DPR Korea, June 15

SOCCER CITY (SOCCER CITY)

CITY: Johannesburg

CAPACITY: 88,460

LOOK OUT FOR: FIFA World Cup final, July 11

FREE STATE STADIUM

CITY: Mangaung/Bloemfontein

CAPACITY: 45,058

LOOK OUT FOR: France v South Africa, June 22

NELSON MANDELA BAY STADIUM

CITY: Nelson Mandela Bay/ Port Elizabeth

CAPACITY: 46,082

LOOK OUT FOR: Ivory Coast v Portugal, June 16

MBOMBELA STADIUM

CITY: Nelspruit

CAPACITY: 43,589

LOOK OUT FOR: Australia v Serbia, June 24

PETER MOKABA STADIUM

CITY: Polokwane

CAPACITY: 45,264

LOOK OUT FOR: Greece v Argentina, June 25

ROYAL BAFOKENG STADIUM

CITY: Rustenburg

CAPACITY: 44,530

LOOK OUT FOR: Ghana v Australia, June 20

LOFTUS VERSFELD STADIUM

CITY: Tshwane/Pretoria

CAPACITY: 49,365

LOOK OUT FOR: Chile v Spain, June 26

Second World Cup with 48 clubs [illegible]

Face painting can be so right for your man brand, or so, so wrong.
Yes
No
Never

2010 FIFA WORLD CUP FIXTURE GUIDE

*All times listed are Australian Eastern Standard Time.

GROUP PHASE

TEAMS	VENUE	DATE	TIME
South Africa v Mexico	Johannesburg (SC)	June 12	Midnight
Uruguay v France	Cape Town	June 12	4.30am
South Africa v Uruguay	Tshwane/Pretoria	June 17	4.30am
France v Mexico	Polokwane	June 18	4.30am
Mexico v Uruguay	Rustenburg	June 23	Midnight
France v South Africa	Mangaung/ Bloemfontein	June 23	Midnight

TEAMS	VENUE	DATE	TIME
England v USA	Rustenburg	June 13	4.30am
Algeria v Slovenia	Polokwane	June 15	9.30pm
Slovenia v USA	Johannesburg (EP)	June 19	Midnight
England v Algeria	Cape Town	June 19	4.30am
Slovenia v England	Nelson Mandela Bay/Port Elizabeth	June 24	Midnight
USA v Algeria	Tshwane/Pretoria	June 24	Midnight

TEAMS	VENUE	DATE	TIME
Korea Republic v Greece	Nelson Mandela Bay/Port Elizabeth	June 12	9.30pm
Argentina v Nigeria	Johannesburg (EP)	June 13	Midnight
Argentina v Korea Republic	Johannesburg (SC)	June 17	9.30pm
Greece v Nigeria	Mangaung/ Bloemfontein	June 18	Midnight
Nigeria v Korea Republic	Durban	June 23	4.30am
Greece v Argentina	Polokwane	June 23	4.30am

TEAMS	VENUE	DATE	TIME
Serbia v Ghana	Tshwane/Pretoria	June 13	Midnight
Germany v Australia	Durban	June 14	4.30am
Germany v Serbia	Nelson Mandela Bay/Port Elizabeth	June 18	9.30pm
Ghana v Australia	Rustenburg	June 20	Midnight
Ghana v Germany	Johannesburg (SC)	June 24	4.30am
Australia v Serbia	Nelspruit	June 24	4.30am

KNOCKOUT PHASE

Round of 16

1 **Winner Grp A v Runner-up Grp B**
Nelson Mandela Bay/Port Elizabeth
June 27, Midnight

2 **Winner Grp C v Runner-up Grp D**
Rustenburg
June 27, 4.30am

5 **Winner Grp E v Runner-up Grp F**
Durban
June 29, Midnight

6 **Winner Grp G v Runner-up Grp H**
Johannesburg (EP)
June 29, 4.30am

Quarter-finals

B **Winner match 1 v Winner match 2**
Johannesburg (SC)
July 2, 4.30am

A **Winner match 5 v Winner match 6**
Nelson Mandela Bay/Port Elizabeth
July 3, Midnight

Semi-finals

Winner QF B v Winner QF A
Cape Town
July 7, 4.30am

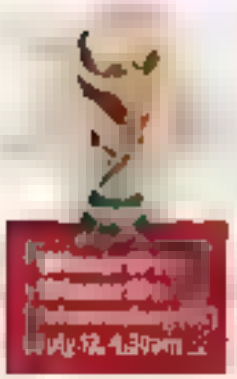
TEAMS	VENUE	DATE	TIME
Netherlands v Denmark	Johannesburg (SP)	June 14	9.30pm
Japan v Cameroon	Mangaung Bloemfontein	June 15	Midnight
Netherlands v Japan	Durban	June 19	9.30pm
Cameroon v Denmark	Tshwane (Pretoria)	June 20	4.30am
Denmark v Japan	Rustenburg	June 25	4.30am
Cameroon v Netherlands	Cape Town	June 25	4.30am

TEAMS	VENUE	DATE	TIME
Ivory Coast v Portugal	Nelson Mandela Bay, Port Elizabeth	June 16	Midnight
Brazil v DPR Korea	Johannesburg (SP)	June 16	4.30am
Brazil v Ivory Coast	Johannesburg (SP)	June 21	4.30am
Portugal v DPR Korea	Cape Town	June 21	9.30pm
Portugal v Brazil	Durban	June 26	Midnight
DPR Korea v Ivory Coast	Nelspruit	June 26	Midnight

TEAMS	VENUE	DATE	TIME
Italy v Paraguay	Cape Town	June 15	4.30am
New Zealand v Slovakia	Rustenburg	June 15	9.30pm
Slovakia v Paraguay	Mangaung Bloemfontein	June 20	9.30pm
Italy v New Zealand	Nelspruit	June 21	Midnight
Slovakia v Italy	Johannesburg (SP)	June 25	Midnight
Paraguay v New Zealand	Polokwane	June 25	Midnight

TEAMS	VENUE	DATE	TIME
Honduras v Chile	Nelspruit	June 16	9.30pm
Spain v Switzerland	Durban	June 17	Midnight
Chile v Switzerland	Nelson Mandela Bay, Port Elizabeth	June 22	Midnight
Spain v Honduras	Johannesburg (SP)	June 22	4.30am
Chile v Spain	Tshwane (Pretoria)	June 26	4.30am
Switzerland v Honduras	Mangaung Bloemfontein	June 26	4.30am

Final



THIRD PLACE PLAY OFF

Semi-finals

2 Winner QF C v Winner QF D
Durban
July 8, 4.30am

Quarter-finals

C Winner match q v Winner match j
Cape Town
July 4, Midnight

D Winner match y v Winner match θ
Johannesburg (SP)
July 4, 4.30am

Round of 16

4 Winner Grp B v Runner-up Grp A
Johannesburg
June 28, 4.30am

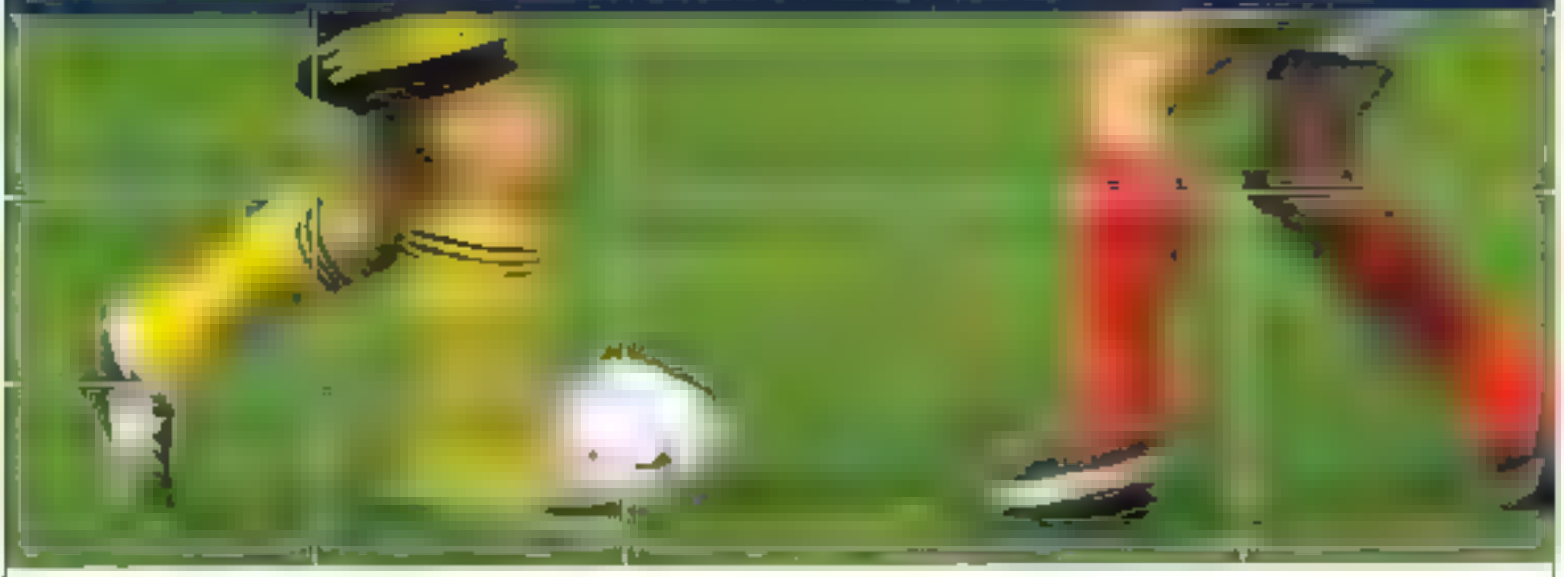
3 Winner Grp D v Runner-up Grp C
Mangaung Bloemfontein
June 28, Midnight

7 Winner Grp F v Runner-up Grp E
Tshwane (Pretoria)
June 30, Midnight

8 Winner Grp H v Runner-up Grp G
Cape Town
June 30, 4.30am

Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission

WINNING PARTNERSHIP



The Australian Sports Commission proudly supports Football Federation Australia

The Australian Sports Commission is the Australian Government agency that develops, supports and invests in sport at all levels in Australia. Football Federation Australia has worked closely with the Australian Sports Commission to develop football from community participation to high-level performance.

Football Federation Australia is one of many national sporting organisations that has formed a winning partnership with the Australian Sports Commission to develop its sport in Australia.

AUSTRALIAN SPORTS COMMISSION

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Qantas Socceroos v New Zealand
BEST OF ENEMIES

The trans-Tasman rivals have met in 62 internationals, but tonight's match will hold particular significance. BY JOHN MURRAY

OLD FOES Vaughan Coveny and Simon Colosimo lock horns in the nations' last match in 2006.

When the invitations were handed out to the football world's biggest party there must have been a few raised eyebrows when Australia and New Zealand were announced on South Africa's guest list.

Not that it was remarkable for one of the countries to qualify for the 2010 FIFA World Cup. But both at the same time? It just doesn't happen.

Hardly surprising, you might point out, as for years the two Oceanian rivals were gunning for one spot at football's global spectacular. In fact, it was more like half a spot, as the Oceanian champion then had to negotiate a nasty play-off against a South American or Asian powerhouse. Between them, the two countries qualified for the tournament just three times up to 2006 (Australia in 1974 and 2006, New Zealand in 1982).

It was Australia's move to the Asian Football Confederation that opened the door of opportunity – not just for the Qantas Socceroos, but also New Zealand in the absence of its long-time sparring partner.

Suddenly, the journey to the promised land no longer seemed so arduous – and both countries have made the most of their chance. And so it is that the first FIFA World Cup to be held on the African continent will provide a historic first for the trans-Tasman neighbours.

Yes, it will take a small miracle for the nations to meet in the tournament, drawn in tough groups on opposite sides of the draw. But it goes without saying that each country will be keeping one eye on the progress of its closest rival.

First up – though, is the chance to lay the opening blow of this latest bout in tonight's clash at the MCG.

There have been plenty of stoushes since Australia and New Zealand first met in a full international at Carisbrooke Park in Dunedin in 1922. Bill Maunder scored the Socceroos first ever international goal, but it was not enough to prevent his country from slumping to a 3-1 loss.

Thank all for Australians, that defeat was not a sign of things to come. In all, the two nations have played 62 internationals, with the Qantas Socceroos coming out on top 38 times and New Zealand on just 13 occasions.

There have been some bitter pills for the Kavis to swallow along the way, none more so than in 1936. In a three-match series in New Zealand,

The nadir for the All Whites was a 10-0 thrashing in Wellington.

Australia plundered 21 goals and conceded only two. The nadir for the All Whites was a 10-0 thrashing in Wellington, a scoreline that remains their biggest loss.

Many of their internationals have been friendly matches, but when it came to the crunch in FIFA World Cup qualifiers, Australia often emerged as top dog.

In 1993, the teams – as Oceania group winners – met over two legs to decide which nation would be the champion of the continent. Graham Arnold's goal gave Australia the advantage in Auckland, before strikes from Carl Veart, Antonio Vidmar and Ned Zelic sealed the tie a week later in Melbourne. The Qantas Socceroos went on to eliminate Canada in a penalty shootout with Mark Schwarzer giving the first indications of his skills in that discipline, before a narrow loss to Argentina meant they missed out on the 1994 FIFA World Cup.

Zelic and Arnold again broke Kiwi hearts in a 2-0 win for Terry Venables' team in Sydney in 1997, booking a date with Iran in another two-legged decider that ended in disappointment. And four years later, the Qantas Socceroos cruised to a 6-0 aggregate win over the same opponent, with Brett Emerton netting three times in the two legs. In each, the right to face Uruguay and the chance to reach the 2002 FIFA World Cup.

It hasn't always been a one-way story, though. While Australia has held the upper hand in more recent times, New Zealand supporters will always have fond memories of the 1982 FIFA World Cup qualifiers.

The two rivals kicked off the Oceania campaign in 1981 with a pulsating 3-3 draw in Auckland. The All Whites trailed three times but refused to be down, and Steve Sumner's late goal earned a point. A month later in Sydney, Steve Wooddin and Grant Turner cruised the Australians in a 2-0 triumph prompting coach Rudi Gutendorf to resign immediately after the match.

With Australia's qualifying campaign in tatters, New Zealand cruised through the Oceania group, dropping just two points in eight games. But that was far from the end of it. The All Whites then had to negotiate home and away ties against China, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia before nearing the Chinese in a sudden-death decider to seal their first appearance at a FIFA World Cup, in Spain.

Wins over their neighbours have been a rarity for the All Whites since then, their last victory coming in Auckland in 2001 when Ryan Nelsen scored the only goal against an undermanned Australian side.

Most recently of all, the countries played on neutral soil at Fulham's Craven Cottage in 2005. Simon Colosimo scored the game's only goal with just three minutes left on the clock.

That match was coach Ricki Herbert's first game in charge.

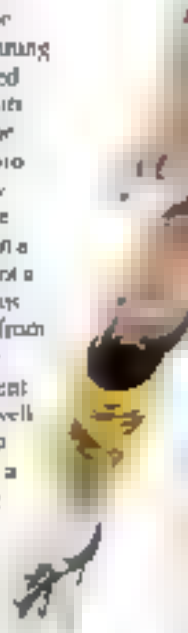
While Shane Smeltz provides the firepower up forward and Blackburn Rovers skipper Nelsen is the most familiar face to overseas viewers, it is Herbert who has played the pivotal role in New Zealand's success, both at international and domestic level. Was it he guided Wellington Phoenix to the Hyundai A-League preliminary final this year.

Herbert, 49, who played for his country at the 1982 FIFA World Cup, was the toast of New Zealand after steering the side to the biggest sporting tournament on the planet.

The 2005 match was coach Ricki Herbert's first game in charge.

The All Whites comfortably topped the first group in the 2008 OFC Nations Cup, winning their first five games – helped in no small part by eight goals from Smeltz, a change to the qualifying system for the 2010 FIFA World Cup meant New Zealand then had to face the fifth-placed Asian country in a two-legged play-off – and not a South American nation. Thus the All Whites were spared from a rocky home and away tie against Uruguay, an opponent Australian Jesse only too well.

Still, Herbert's men had a daunting challenge against a highly fancied Bahrain side which had eliminated Asian heavyweight Saudi Arabia to reach the decider.



JOB DONE
Andy Boyers (left) and Tim Brown enjoy the All Whites' win over Bahrain

NEW ZEALAND

The Facts

- New Zealand has an estimated population of 4.3 million (five times smaller than Australia).
- The New Zealand football team is nicknamed the 'All Whites'.
- New Zealand has played in one previous FIFA World Cup, in 1982.
- New Zealand played Australia in its first international, winning 3-1 in 1922.
- New Zealand has played Australia 62 times, for 13 wins, 28 losses and 13 draws.
- New Zealand has won the Oceania Football Confederations Cup four times.
- Ivan Vicelich is New Zealand's most capped player, with 65 appearances.
- New Zealand's highest FIFA world ranking was 47 in August 2002.
- Its lowest FIFA world ranking was 156 in September 2007.
- Vaughan Coveny is New Zealand's all-time leading goalscorer, netting 28 times.
- New Zealand's biggest win was a 13-0 thrashing of Fiji in 1981.
- Its worst defeat came at the hands of Australia – a 10-0 loss in 1998.

PATH TO SOUTH AFRICA

[illegible]

Fiji 0 New Zealand 2

Vanuatu 1 New Zealand 2

New Zealand 4 Vanuatu 1

New Caledonia 1 New Zealand 3

New Zealand 0 New Caledonia 0

New Zealand 0 Fiji 2

*New Zealand won the group to qualify for an inter-confederation play-off.

[illegible]

Bahrain 0 New Zealand 0

New Zealand 1 Bahrain 0

*New Zealand wins 1-0 on aggregate.

NEW ZEALAND FOOTBALL

MELBOURNE MAGIC
Tim Cahill scored twice against Japan at the MCG last year

There was no ice between the teams over 180 minutes, with New Zealand defending stoutly and Bahrain squandering several chances in the first game in Manama. Goalkeeper Mark Paston, standing in for the suspended Glen Moss, was the hero in his team held out for a 0-0 draw.

Goals were also hard to come by in the second leg in Wellington, but Rory Fallon broke the deadlock on the stroke of half-time to give the home side a precious lead. The crucial moment of the tie came early in the second half when Tony Lochhead conceded a penalty. Once again, Paston proved impassable, saving Sayed Adnan's effort, and the All Whites held on to book their first FIFA World Cup appearance in 28 years.

Australia, of course, is all too familiar with nerve-racking play-offs, although it enjoyed a far smoother path to qualification this time.

It was in the warm-up games before the 2006 FIFA World Cup that the Qantas Socceroos signalled they would be more than just also-rans in Germany. A 1-0 win over reigning European champion Greece in front of more than 95,000 fans at the MCG was followed by an impressive 1-1 draw with the Netherlands in Rotterdam. A few weeks later, Guus Hiddink's team was a couple of minutes away from taking 10 man Italy to extra time in the last 16.

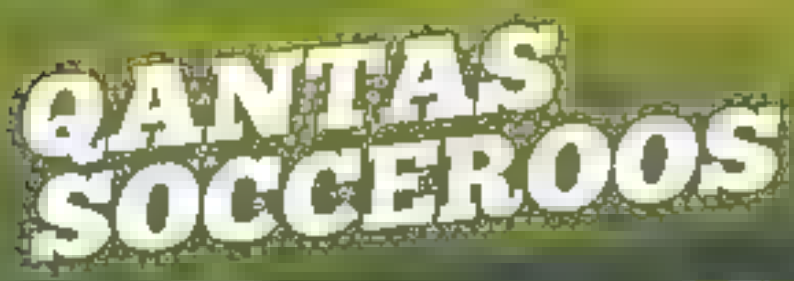
Coach Pim Verbeek will be hoping his side can take a similar vein of form to South Africa, with more friendlies to come against Denmark and the USA before the campaign proper starts against Germany on June 13. The Dutchman has almost his best squad to choose from tonight, with a host of big names returning from Europe for the farewell match.

The Qantas Socceroos boast an impressive form line when they have been at full strength. Most recently they enjoyed two hard-fought wins over Oman in the AFC Asian Cup qualifiers. Before that, there was the goalless draw with the Netherlands in Sydney and a 2010 FIFA World Cup qualification campaign that produced six wins and two draws from eight games in the final group phase.

Australia's appearances at the MCG in recent years have been few and far between. Since the 2006 FIFA World Cup, the Qantas Socceroos have played just twice at the people's ground, losing 1-0 to Lionel Messi and Argentina in a 2007 friendly before Tim Cahill struck twice in a 2-1 win over Japan last year. The most famous match remains that tireful 2-2 draw with Iran at the MCG in 1997 when Terry Venables and his team were on the brink of qualifying for the 1998 FIFA World Cup before two goals in four minutes shattered their dream.

Expect both teams to be ultra-competitive tonight. With players hoping to seal their spots in the starting line-ups for South Africa, and given the history between the two nations, this will be a friendly in the loosest sense of the word. ●

The Giant Qantas Socceroos Supporter



Write the player numbers in the spaces provided below when tonight's teams are announced.

Adam Federici
Eugene Galekovic
Bradley Jones
Mark Schwarzer

Sione Lowry
Mark Milligan
Craig Moore
Lucas Neill
Jade North
Rhys Williams

Mark Bresciano
Tim Cahill
Nick Carle
Jason Culina
Brett Emerton
Richard Garcia

Mile Jedinak
Tommy Oar
Carl Veart
Dario Vidosic

Josh Kennedy
Harry Kewell

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NEW ZEALAND

FOOTBALL

James Bannatyne
Glen Moss
Mark Paston

Ben Sigmund
Tommy Smith
Ivan Vicelich

Simon Elliott
Michael McGlinchey
David Mulligan

Rudy Bryson
Tony Lochhead
Ryan Nelsen
Winston Reid

Andy Barron
Leo Bertos
Tim Brown
Jeremy Christie
Aaron Clapham

Jeremy Brockie
Rory Fallon
Chris Killen
Shane Smeltz
Chris Wood

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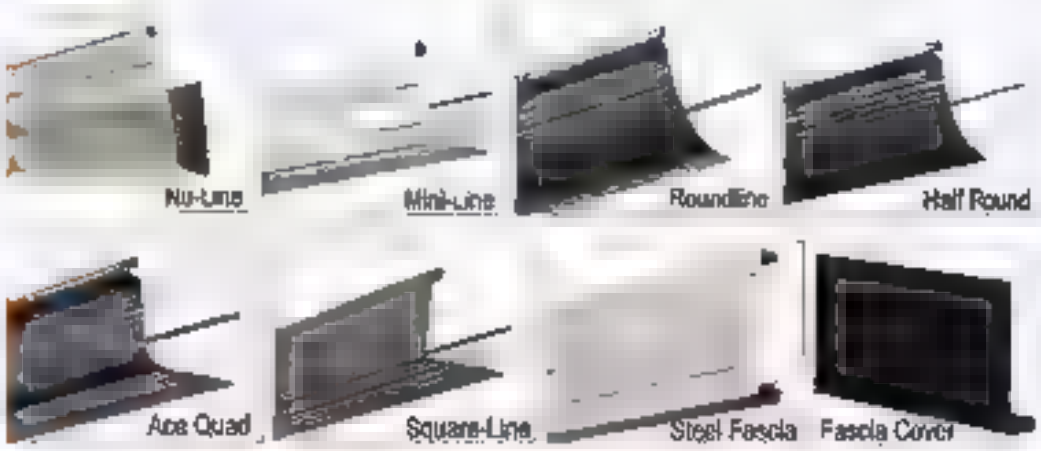

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MEET THE QANTAS SOCCEROOS

Fourteen players from Australia's 2006 FIFA World Cup squad made the preliminary squad for South Africa. BY JOHN MURRAY AND [illegible]

When Ruin Verbeek announced the Qantas Socceroos squad on May 15, the Australian head coach did not just have tonight's match against New Zealand in mind. The selected players make up Australia's preliminary squad for the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

Of the 31 players who made the cut, eight unlucky ones will miss out on playing in South Africa, with the final 23 to be confirmed by June 1.

FIFA regulations determined only 30 players could be named in the preliminary squad. Eugene Galekovic is the 31st man, joining the squad as a stand-by keeper.

The squad is a mixture of youth and experience. Fourteen players were named from the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany, with Mark Schwarzer the eldest statesman at 37. At the other end of the scale, six players – James Holland, Shane Lowry, Tommy Oar, Nikita Rukavytsya, Dario Vidosic and Rhys Williams – are aged 23 or under. At 18, Oar is the youngest squad member.

Overseas-based players make up the majority of the squad, with 10 different countries represented at club level. England, with 11 players, is the most popular country, then the Netherlands (five) and Turkey (three).

Jason Culina, Galekovic and Melbourne Heart's new signing Michael Beauchamp are the three players representing the Hyundai A-League.

GLOBAL GAME: Members of the Qantas Socceroos squad play in 10 different countries.

The Squad

Australia's 31-man squad is made up of four goalkeepers, 10 defenders, 13 midfielders and four strikers.

GOALKEEPER

Adam Federici

AGE 25

CLUB READING (ENG)

CAPS 0

Yet to win a cap for the Qantas Socceroos, Federici gave his chances of selection a major boost with a solid season as Reading regular goalkeeper in the English Championship in particular. He caught the eye in the FA Cup as the Royals knocked out two Premiership sides. Federici has been a part of several international squads and started for the Qantas Olyroos at the Beijing Olympics in 2008.

GOALKEEPER

Eugene Galekovic

AGE 25

CLUB ADELAIDE UNITED AUS

CAPS 1

Galekovic has gone from strength to strength since joining Adelaide United in 2002, being named the Hyundai A-League Goalkeeper of the Year in the past two seasons. His form in the AFC Champions League has been excellent, and in the absence of Mark Schwarzer for several AFC Asian Cup qualifiers, he was given the nod between the sticks ahead of his Hyundai A-League rivals.

GOALKEEPER

Bradley Jones

AGE 26

CLUB MIDDLESBROUGH (ENG)

CAPS 1

After several seasons as second-choice keeper behind Mark Schwarzer at Middlesbrough, Jones is encountering a similar situation at international level. When Schwarzer moved to Fulham, Jones finally got his chance – a reward for sticking with the side he rested in 2006. He was in and out of the team in 2009, so, but made the No. 1 spot his own at the business end of the season.

GOALKEEPER

Mark Schwarzer

AGE 37

CLUB FULHAM (ENG)

CAPS 72

The most-capped Australian goalkeeper in history, Schwarzer has enjoyed a stellar season with club side Fulham. He pulled off heroics as the London side advanced to the final of the Europa League. In February, he was named the Premiership Player of the Month, the first Australian to win the award. He continues to defy his age to be one of the most consistent players for the Qantas Socceroos.

DEFENDER

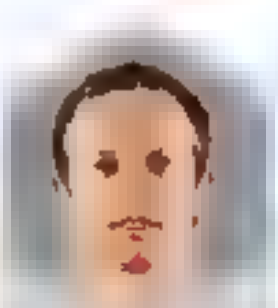
Michael Beauchamp

AGE 25

CLUB MELBOURNE HEART (AUS)

CAPS 18

One of only two Hyundai A-League players to make the squad, Beauchamp has the chance to appear on football's biggest stage again. The strong and speedy central defender became Melbourne Heart's latest signing last month, joining the new franchise after a successful spell with UAE side Al-Jazira. He'll be keen to get on the park in South Africa after not starting any game during Germany four years ago.



DEFENDER

David Carney

AGE 28

CLUB FC TWENTE (NETH)

CAPS 23

A shoulder injury disrupted Carney's season with Hull City but he returned in April and his form took out the Eredivisie title he played alongside Wayne Rooney at youth level and holds some of the same qualities as the Manchester striker. He made his international debut in 2008 and in 2008, played for Australia in the Olympics before signing with his English club at the time Sheffield United.

DEFENDER

Scott Chipperfield

AGE 34

CLUB FC BASEL (SWI)

CAPS 61

Chipperfield began his career at the Wollongong Wolves, scoring on back-to-back NSL titles in consecutive years. He moved to FC Basel in the Swiss league where he has enjoyed significant success, including a hat-trick of scoring titles in 2010. A reliable defender for the Qantas Socceroos, he offers pin-point good attacking positions – as he did in October against Oman to set up Tim Cahill's winning goal at Etihad Stadium.

DEFENDER

Shane Lowry

AGE 23

CLUB ASTON VILLA (ENG)

CAPS 0

Lowry represented the Republic of Ireland at all levels – even nominated to Australia – the country of his birth – instead and he never appears to have paid off with a spot in the FIFA World Cup on his sights. A classy defender who can play at left-back or in the middle, he has been on Aston Villa's books since the age of 15. On loan to Leeds United in 2009-10, he played in both of the promotion play-off games in the Football Championship.

DEFENDER

Mark Milligan

AGE 30

CLUB SGC UNITED (JAP)

CAPS 9

Milligan was the hero against Indonesia in March, scoring the only goal – his first at international level – to seal Australia's qualification for the AFC Asian Cup 2011. He plies his trade with Japanese side JEF United after leaving Chinese club Shanghai Shenhua in January. Milligan's hard-nosed and competitive approach defines the way he plays, and he is starting to emerge into a regular squad member.

Mark Bresciano

AGE 30

CLUB PALERMO (ITA)

CAPS 52

Bresciano endured a frustrating time with Palermo in Serie A in 2009-10, as a back injury restricted his opportunities. He remains a crucial player for the Qantas Socceroos and is still best remembered for scoring the crucial goal against Uruguay in Sydney when Australia qualified for the 2006 FIFA World Cup. A physical and talented midfielder, he played a crucial role in the 2010 FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign.

Tim Cahill

AGE 30

CLUB EVERTON (ENG)

CAPS 77

Perhaps Australia's best player, and certainly its most prolific goalscorer, Cahill averages a strike rate of better than a goal every other game for his country. His aggression, close-out prominence in the air make him one of the hardest players to stop. He happens to find the net in times in the 2009-10 season, showing strong form late in the campaign. Could repeat his heroics at Johannesburg in June in South Africa.

Nick Carle

AGE 28

CLUB CRYSTAL PALACE (ENG)

CAPS 13

At one time, Carle wowed admirers to make it back into Australia colours, but he has defied the odds. He won the Johnny Warren Players' Player of the Year award in 2007 on the Hyundai A-League with Newcastle Jets, which sparked a return to the national side – and he endured a nervous end to the English Championship season at Crystal Palace, signing off on the final day at the expense of Sheffield Wednesday.

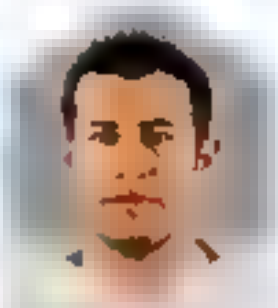
Jason Culina

AGE 29

CLUB GOLD COAST UNITED (AUS)

CAPS 49

Culina returned home to be Gold Coast's marquee player for the Hyundai A-League 2009-10 season, and the captain did not disappoint, leading the club to the finals. The move came after many successful years in the Netherlands, and he has continued to represent the Qantas Socceroos since making his A-League debut. A multi-tasker always looking to push forward, he started all four games in the 2006 FIFA World Cup.



Brett Emerton

AGE 31

CLUB BLACKBURN (ENG)

CAPS 72

Emerton successfully returned to the international fold against the Netherlands last October and netted a vital winner away to Oman in Muscat a month later. His return to action came after a lengthy period on the sidelines with a serious knee injury. The versatile player has been back to his most exciting best for English Premiership side Blackburn, playing as a right-back or winger. Boasts international experience and brings crucial experience to the team.

Craig Moore

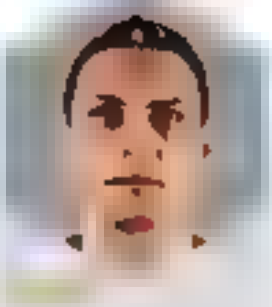
AGE 34
CLUB UNCONTRACTED
CAPS 67

It has been an interesting past six months for Moore who joined Greek side [illegible] in January, and then opted to return to Australia after three months with his new club. A regular defender for the Qantas Socceroos since his debut in 1996, his [illegible] and experience at the back continues to prove invaluable for his country. He is [illegible] under pressure but also a tough tackler. Likely to be his [illegible] awakening

Lucas Neill

AGE 32
CLUB GALATASARAY (TUR)
CAPS 53

After leaving West Ham at the end of the [illegible] season, Neill joined [illegible] Turkish club [illegible] before he was snapped up by Galatasaray, home of Harry Newell, in January. Capable in the air but also a smart playmaker, he produced a string of excellent performances for the Turkish side. Neill captained the Qantas Socceroos throughout the 2010 FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign



Jade North

AGE 34
CLUB [illegible] (NOR)
CAPS 59

After [illegible] opportunities with Korean side Incheon United, North moved to Norwegian club Tromso in February in the hope of regular football. An attacking full back, he played for the Qantas Olyroos at the Athens and Beijing [illegible] impact becoming the first [illegible] Australian in [illegible] appearances for Newcastle Jets in the Hyundai A-League before he moved to Asia

Luke Wilkshire

AGE 28
CLUB DYNAMO MOSCOW (RUS)
CAPS 60

A surprise inclusion in Guus Hiddink's 2006 FIFA World Cup squad, Wilkshire [illegible] the Qantas Socceroos most valuable players. A versatile footballer who can play in defence or midfield, he proved his attacking nature when he scored his first international goal against Oman and Kuwait in the AFC Asian Cup qualifiers. Joined Dynamo Moscow in 2008 and recently signed a new three-year deal.

Rhys Williams

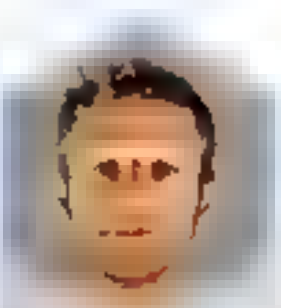
AGE 21
CLUB MIDDLESBROUGH (ENG)
CAPS 3

Williams made his international debut at the AFC [illegible] against Japan last June. With a [illegible] month contract he quickly showed why he was the green and gold [illegible] after several appearances for the Welsh under-21 side. He has shown talent playing in a variety of positions, and appeared regularly for Middlesbrough in 2009/10. Will be looking to rebound from his red card against Oman in Muscat.

Richard Garcia

AGE 28
CLUB HULL (ENG)
CAPS 5

Garcia will be keen to make up for a disappointing end to the English Premiership season with Hull as he [illegible] the international stage. The midfielder was part of the Hull side that was relegated to the English Championship after two entertaining years up the top flight. An [illegible] player who has spent most of his career in England, since he joined the famed West Ham youth academy as a teenager, Garcia will hope to add to his five international caps.



Vincenzo Grella

AGE 34
CLUB BLACKBURN (ENG)
CAPS 42

Australia's versatile defensive midfielder, Grella has been an integral part of the [illegible] line-up since establishing himself in the side in 2006. After many years in Italy with Empoli, Parma and Torino, he joined Blackburn, and veteran national teammate Brett Emerton, in the English Premiership at [illegible]. Grella has struggled with calf and knee injuries this year, but returned to fitness, and form, for Rovers near the end of the season.

James Holland

AGE 23
CLUB AZ ALKMAAR (NETH)
CAPS 4

Holland has enjoyed a rapid rise through the Australian [illegible] representing his country at junior levels before making his senior debut against Singapore at Jean [illegible]. A talented midfielder, he played in Newcastle Jets' Hyundai A-League title winning campaign before moving to Dutch club AZ Alkmaar in 2009. Holland recently celebrated his 23rd birthday and is one of the squad's youngest players.

Brett Holman

AGE 26
CLUB AZ ALKMAAR (NETH)
CAPS 29

After playing a bit-part role in AZ Alkmaar's Eredivisie title campaign in 2008/09, Holman entered [illegible] game time in the Netherlands and remained in the UEFA Champions League. A speedy goal scoring [illegible] has [illegible] was in the away fixture to Inter and he appears poised to become a regular for Australia after missing out on selection for the 2006 FIFA World Cup.

Mile Jedinak

AGE 25
CLUB ANTALYASPOR GENCLERBIRLIGI (TUR)
CAPS 9

After starring with Central [illegible] Mariners in the Hyundai A-League, Jedinak joined Genclerbirligi in Turkey in 2009 before making a loan move to Antalyaspor for the 2010 season. He mostly played alongside the defensive midfielder appearing regularly. He has also been a familiar presence in the national squad since his debut in 2008 and provides excellent cover in the [illegible] of the park.

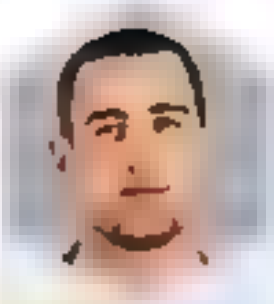
Tommy Oar

AGE [illegible]

CLUB [illegible]

CAPS [illegible]

It's hard to remember this [illegible] Harry Kewell burst on to [illegible] his debut against Indonesia in March and showed his [illegible] opponents. The youngest [illegible] Hyundai A-League, he recently moved from [illegible] An excitement machine.



Carl Valeri

AGE 25

CLUB [illegible]

CAPS [illegible]

After joining Italian giant [illegible] failing to play a game for the Serie A side, Valeri found his niche as captain [illegible] Sassuolo, playing a key role in his new club's fight for promotion. A no-nonsense defensive midfielder, he looms as [illegible] Vincenzo Grella – and is [illegible]

Dario Vidosic

AGE [illegible]

CLUB [illegible]

CAPS [illegible]

While he remains on the books of Bundesliga side [illegible] Duisburg this year as he hunted first-team football [illegible] level, and has made three [illegible] prospect who can play in several positions.

STRIKER

Josh Kennedy

AGE 27

CLUB [illegible]

CAPS [illegible]

One year on from leaving Germany for [illegible] to prosper at Nagoya [illegible] start to the new J-League [illegible] who rose to prominence at the 2006 FIFA World Cup, is difficult to stop in the air – all six goals for the Qantas Socceroos have come from his head.

STRIKER

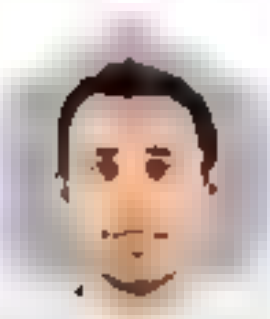
Harry Kewell

AGE [illegible]

CLUB [illegible]

CAPS [illegible]

One of the [illegible] had been playing some [illegible]



STRIKER

Scott McDonald

AGE [illegible]

CLUB [illegible]

CAPS [illegible]

McDonald's highly [illegible] stint at Celtic ended at [illegible] not being guaranteed a starting place – despite his phenomenal strike rate. Strongly built and robust he got off the mark against [illegible] score for his country, he will [illegible]

STRIKER

Nikita Rukavytsya

AGE [illegible]

CLUB [illegible]

CAPS [illegible]

[illegible] players at the FIFA World [illegible] form for Belgian side KSV Roeselare. The young [illegible] scoresheet, particularly at [illegible] in Ukraine, Rukavytsya [illegible] Qantas Socceroos against [illegible] last year.

COACH

Pim Verbeek

AGE [illegible]

POSITION [illegible]

[illegible] job in Australian football when he replaced Graham [illegible] leading the Qantas [illegible] in Europe and Asia. He [illegible] Morocco who's Australia's South African campaign [illegible]

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Lindsay McNeill

[illegible]

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Ones to Watch

NEW ZEALAND FOOTBALL

Meet five New Zealand players who could [illegible]

Rory Fallon celebrates the goal that took the All Whites to the [illegible] FIFA World Cup

[illegible]

In Smeltz, New Zealand has a striker of genuine class who, on his day, can trouble the world's best defences. It was Smeltz's goals that propelled the All Whites through the Oceania qualifying stages for the 2010 FIFA World Cup. He scored in all five games he played, netting eight times as New Zealand comfortably topped the group. After playing for several clubs in England, Smeltz has flourished in the Hyundai A-League first with Wellington Phoenix where he won the Golden Boot in 2008/09, and then last season with Gold Coast United, where he scored a record 16 goals. Looms as a major threat for the All Whites tonight.

RORY FALLON

Fallon will always hold a special place in New Zealand football history after his header against Bahrain booked his country's spot at the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Fallon, whose father Kevin coached the All Whites at the 1982 FIFA World Cup, chose to represent England as a junior and was ineligible to play for New Zealand at senior level until a rule change by FIFA last year. Good in the air and on the ground, the striker has played for several clubs in the English lower leagues and is currently with Plymouth Argyle. He made his New Zealand debut in September 2009, scoring against Jordan.

RYAN NELSEN

The rock of the All Whites defence, Nelsen was immense in the crucial play-off against Bahrain, helping New Zealand keep a clean sheet in both legs. Nelsen, who captains English Premiership club Blackburn as well as his country, sent a scare through the New Zealand camp when he injured his knee earlier in the year, but he made a successful return in May after a six-week layoff. A strong and composed central defender, Nelsen has the highest profile of anyone in the New Zealand squad, having spent six seasons in England's top division. His experience will be priceless in South Africa next month.

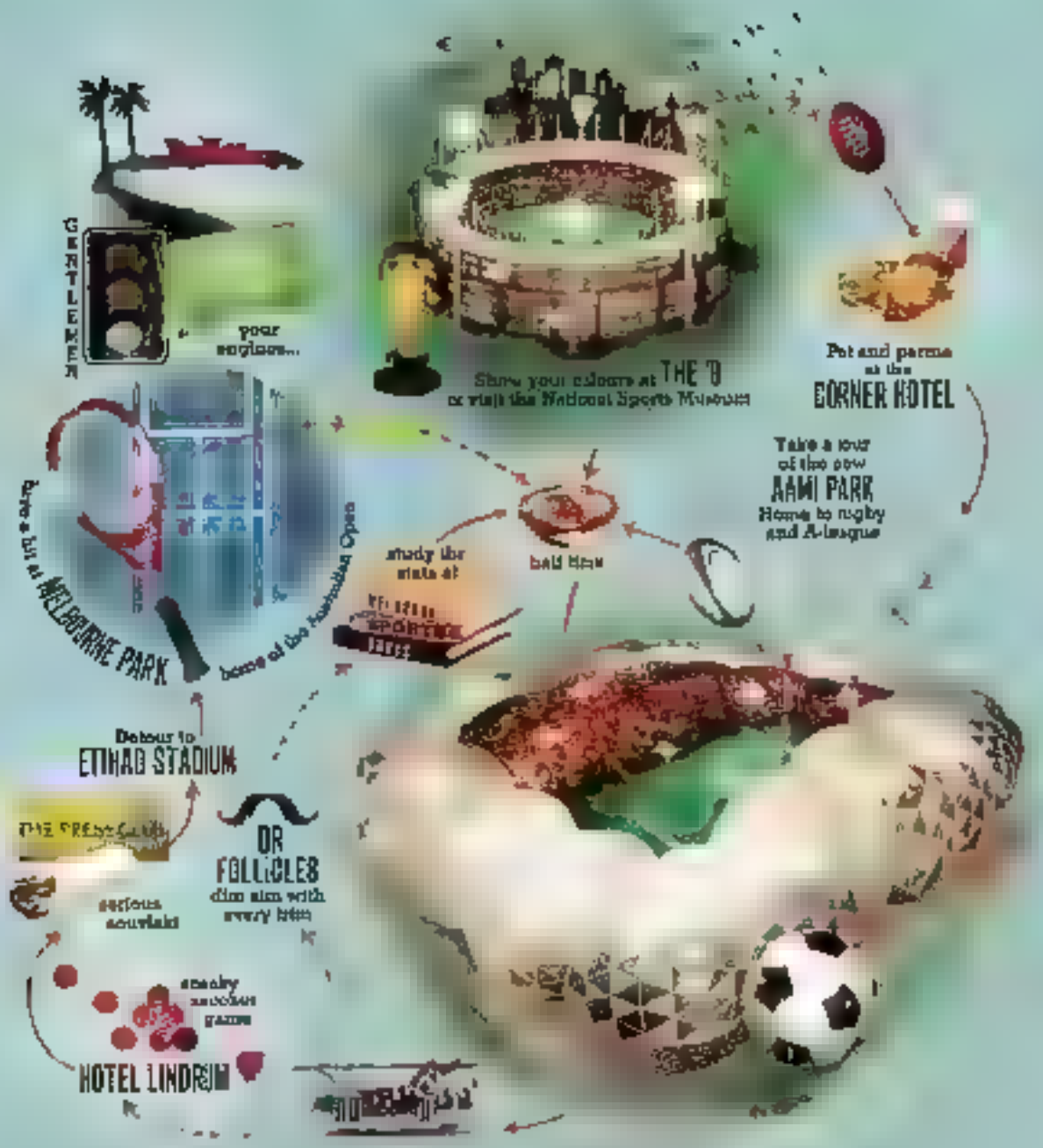
TIM BROWN

Expect Brown to cover every blade of the MCG grass tonight. The hard-working midfielder has enjoyed a tremendous year, playing a key role in the success of the national team and Wellington Phoenix in the Hyundai A-League. Brown spent six seasons playing in the United States before joining Newcastle Jets in 2006, and then the Phoenix a year later. He is known for his late runs into the penalty area, and scored eight goals for the Phoenix last season. An international regular since 1996, Herbert became New Zealand coach in 2008, Brown has captained his country several times in Ryan Nelsen's absence, and is the current vice-captain.

MARK PASTON

Paston has battled with Glen Moss for the No 1 goalkeeping shirt for several years, and got his chance when his rival was suspended for both legs of the Bahrain play-off. Paston made the most of his opportunity, keeping his opponents goalless and, critically, saving a penalty in a man-of-the-match performance in the second game. He also benefited from Moss' move to Melbourne Victory last year, earning regular game time for Wellington Phoenix until he broke his leg in early December. Paston was forced to sit out the remainder of the Phoenix's campaign, but is now ready to reclaim the All Whites' No 1 keeper shirt.

GOAL POACHER Shane Smeltz has an excellent strike rate for his country.



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Countdown to QATAR

A wrap-up of all the AFC Asian Cup 2011 qualifying groups.

BY JOHN MURRAY

GROUP A

Japan and Bahrain traditionally provide the first two spots in Group A, hence there was little surprise when the two finished qualifiers and it was the Japanese who finished top of the pile on the final standings thanks to a 4-0 win. After losing their opening match to the Bahrainis, the Japanese won their next five, securing the best qualifying record from all the groups.

Keisuke Honda and Shinji Okazaki were both on the scoresheet as Zaccheroni's men ran riot against Hong Kong, while Yuto Nagatomo added the finishing touch in a 6-0 win over Yemen.

Hong Kong finally notched its first point, thanks to a goalless draw at home to Yemen. That result capped a solid effort from the Yemenis who, despite failing to qualify, enjoyed wins against Bahrain and Hong Kong and gave Japan a mighty scare too.

Results: Japan 4 Yemen 0, Hong Kong 1 Bahrain 5, Yemen 0 Hong Kong 0, Bahrain 1 Japan 0, Japan 6 Hong Kong 0, Hong Kong 0 Japan 4, Bahrain 4 Yemen 0, Yemen 2 Japan 3, Bahrain 4 Hong Kong 0, Yemen 3 Bahrain 0, Japan 4 Bahrain 0, Hong Kong 0 Yemen 0

GROUP B

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Group B was that qualification was secured with one game remaining. Australia confirmed their ninth consecutive Qatar before the campaign got under way, needing a point at home to Indonesia to reach its second AFC Asian Cup finals. The Qantas Socceroos duly did enough with Mark Milligan scoring in a 0-0 highlight, a scoreless draw that was much more commendable than it appeared, and ensured the Indonesians had just three points to show for their endeavours.

A draw was also all that Kuwait required in a match away from with Oman. Defeat for the Kuwaitis and the Omanis would have scrapped them in the standings, but instead Kuwait finished top, scraping out a goalless draw to finish second in the group.

The result was a crushing blow for Indonesian coach Benny Dollo. As the players were hoping to qualify for the Asian Cup and it was his ambition as well. This is the biggest disappointment in my history as a coach, he said.

Results: Oman 0 Indonesia 0, Kuwait 0 Oman 1, Indonesia 0 Australia 0, Australia 0 Kuwait 1, Australia 1 Oman 0, Oman 1 Australia 2, Kuwait 1 Indonesia 1, Indonesia 1 Kuwait 1, Australia 1 Indonesia 0, Oman 0 Kuwait 0

QATAR-BOUND
Japan's Keisuke Honda stops past Bahrain's Mohamed Mubarak in the 4-0 win.

AFC ASIAN CUP 2011 DRAW

The top two teams from each group will advance to the knockout phase. The tournament will be played from January 7-29, 2011.

Groups

Group A	Qatar, Kuwait, China, Uzbekistan
Group B	[illegible]
Group C	[illegible]
Group D	[illegible]

Qantas Socceroos Fixtures

[illegible]

GROUP C

Uzbekistan became the second victim in as many games of the United Arab Emirates' late show, going down to a sixth minute winner from Sultan Al Menhali. The UAE had already got the better of Malaysia in January after scoring in the third minute of injury time, and the 1-0 victory on enemy turf at Pakhtakor Stadium handed them top spot in Group C.

With Malaysia losing all four of the group games, Uzbekistan and the UAE had already done enough to progress to Qatar before the final match had been played, but the Uzbeks would have been keen to break their losing run at home to the middle-eastern nation. Uzbekistan also lost two FIFA World Cup qualifiers at home against the UAE in recent years.

As winner of the 2008 AFC Challenge Cup, India – the fourth nation in Group C – was not required to play any qualifiers after receiving a bye to the AFC Asian Cup 2011.

Results: Malaysia 0 United Arab Emirates 5, United Arab Emirates 0 Uzbekistan 1, Uzbekistan 3 Malaysia 1, Malaysia 1 Uzbekistan 3, United Arab Emirates 1 Malaysia 0, Uzbekistan 0 United Arab Emirates 1.

FIRST-TIMER Shannon Cole made his debut for Australia against Indonesia in March.

AFC ASIAN CUP 2011 FINAL QUALIFYING GROUPS

The top two teams from each group qualified for the AFC Asian Cup 2011.

Group A

Team	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
JAPAN	6	5	0	1	13	15
BAHRAIN	6	4	0	2	6	12
YEMEN	6	2	1	3	-1	7
HONG KONG	6	0	1	5	-17	1

Group B

Team	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
AUSTRALIA	6	3	2	1	2	10
KUWAIT	6	2	3	1	1	9
OMAN	6	2	2	2	0	8
INDONESIA	6	0	3	3	-3	3

Group C

Team	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
UAE	4	3	0	1	6	9
UZBEKISTAN	4	2	0	2	4	6
MALAYSIA	4	0	0	4	-10	0

Group D

Team	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
SYRIA	6	4	2	0	8	14
CHINA	6	4	1	1	7	13
VIETNAM	6	1	2	3	-2	5
LEBANON	6	0	1	5	-13	1

Group E

Team	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
IRAN	6	4	2	0	9	14
JORDAN	6	3	2	1	6	11
THAILAND	6	2	1	3	-2	7
SINGAPORE	6	0	1	5	-13	1

GROUP D

Syria became the only country to get through qualification undefeated after signing off an excellent campaign with a 4-0 thumping of Lebanon. The Syrians, who won four games and drew the other two, finished one point above second-placed China.

The result was never in doubt at Al Abbasiyyin Stadium after Mahammad Al Zinki and Abdul Fatah Al Agha were on target in the first 10 minutes, with Jehad Al Hussein and substitute Abdul Razak Al Hussain increasing the margin in the second half.

The rout completed a miserable campaign for the Lebanese who managed just one draw from their six games and finished with a goal difference of -13.

Much like the Syrians, the Chinese strolled to qualification after slipping up in their opening fixture. They gained maximum points against Lebanon and Vietnam before ensuring their progress with a goalless draw at home to Syria in January.

Results: Syria 3 China 2, Vietnam 3 Lebanon 1, China 6 Vietnam 1, Lebanon 0 Syria 2, Vietnam 0 Syria 1, Lebanon 0 China 2, Syria 0 Vietnam 0, China 1 Lebanon 0, China 0 Syria 0, Lebanon 1 Vietnam 1, Vietnam 1 China 2, Syria 4 Lebanon 0.

GROUP E

Jordan pulled off the biggest shock in the last round of qualification, edging out Singapore 2-1 to leap from fourth to second in the standings, and book its place in Qatar. There was also heartbreak for Thailand, which needed to beat group winner Iran, but went down to a last-minute goal in a 2-1 loss.

Bryan Robson, the former England captain who took over as Thailand coach in September last year, was disappointed he couldn't lead the team to Qatar.

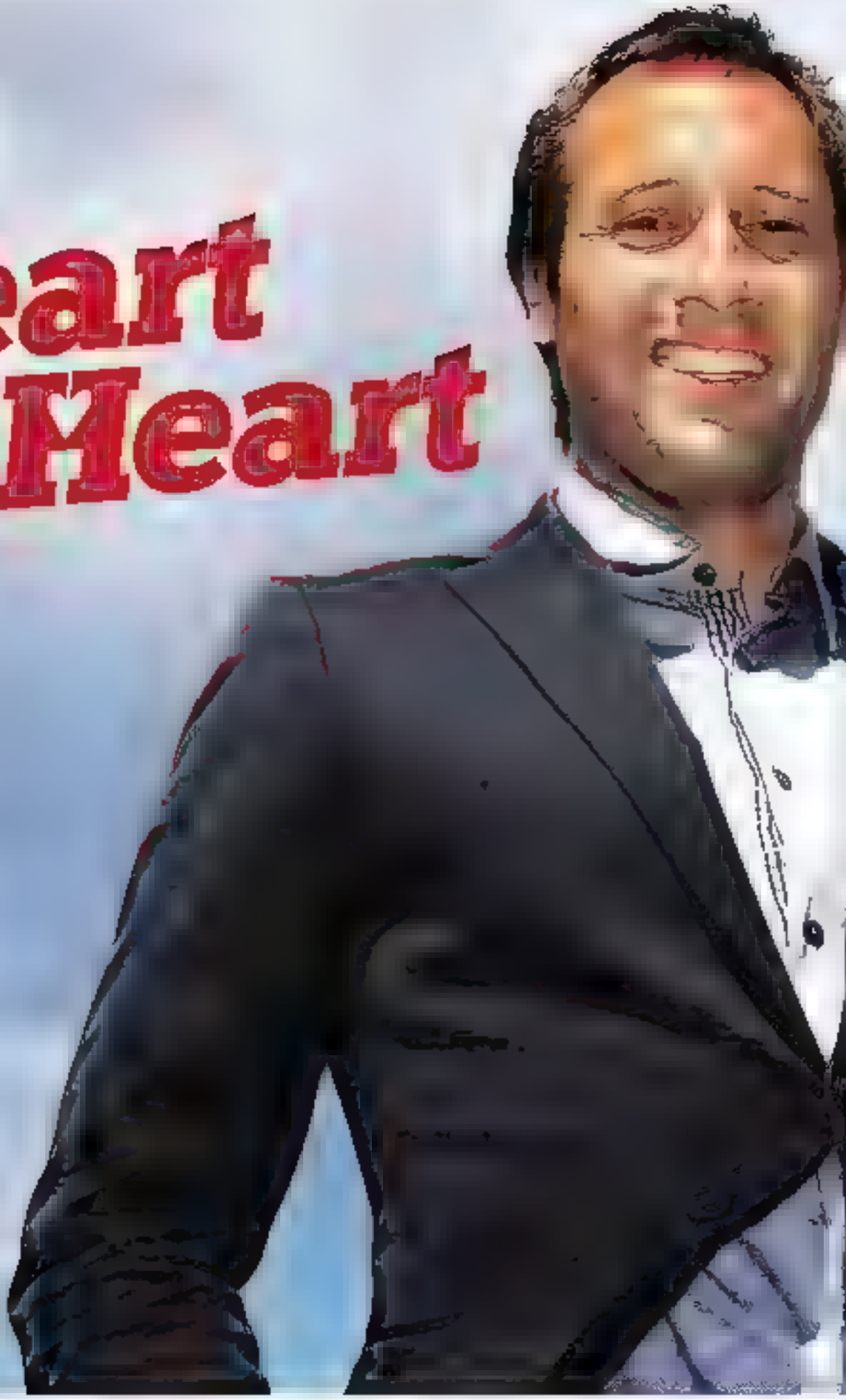
"It is very upsetting not to be in the finals of the tournament," he said. "The team has had many problems since I arrived here. I did my best to resolve these problems but, in the end, could not find a solution to the problems of my offence."

Anas Bani Yaseen was Jordan's hero at King Abdullah International Stadium, his second-half goal earning the three points after Noh Alam Shah had cancelled out Odai Al Saify's opener. A draw would have been enough for Singapore to go through.

Results: Iran 6 Singapore 0, Jordan 0 Thailand 0, Singapore 2 Jordan 1, Thailand 0 Iran 0, Iran 1 Jordan 0, Singapore 1 Thailand 3, Thailand 0 Singapore 1, Jordan 2 Iran 0, Singapore 1 Iran 3, Thailand 0 Jordan 0, Iran 1 Thailand 0, Jordan 2 Singapore 1.

Q&A

Heart to Heart



Melbourne Heart will be the latest addition to the Hyundai A-League in the 2010/11 season. Dutch coach John van't Schip is the man tasked with the challenge of dethroning Melbourne Victory as Victoria's premier team. He spoke to ASHLEY BROWNE.

How have you enjoyed your time as coach of Melbourne Heart so far?
It's been good, although we haven't done that much on the pitch until now. We have only had four or five players from the full squad in training. The others are injured or aren't yet here. We've had a few boys on trial with us, so we've had 10 or 11 on the park most days.

So when do you expect to have the full squad at your disposal?
We start our proper pre-season training on June 7 and, at that time, we hope to have the full squad, which will be about 20 to 22 players.

What sort of game style can we expect to see in the coming season?
Hopefully, we can control the game by keeping possession of the ball and create a lot of scoring opportunities. We would like to defend very high, so that if we lose the ball we can defend high up on the half of the opponent. We need to work very hard on implementing the game plan with the squad over the next few months.

You're still signing players, but the squad at this stage has an even spread of young and experienced players. Has that been the plan all along?
I had a way that I wanted to play and then I spent October and November watching games to find the right sort of players for the type of game that I want. You get a mix like we have and I think that's good.

NEW LEADER
John van't Schip is steadily building an impressive Melbourne Heart squad.

Had you watched much of the Hyundai A-League before you took the job? What are your views on the standard of play? Is it better or worse than you thought?
There's a lot of work to be done with the level. And it's the same with the Asian Champions League as well. There are a lot of steps to be taken to improve the standard of the A-League but it is certainly possible. It's a big challenge and I hope to be part of improving the quality of the league.

What goals have you set for the team next season?
I am aiming to get into the system and to establish the style of play that I want. If we do that, then we should get some results, some wins. The most important thing is that my vision is translated on to the pitch. Now, if we end up as champions, that would be great, but I think it will take some time. We have the players and the team that should contend, we should be quite competitive.

You've signed Clint Bolton, John Aloisi, Matt Thompson and others who are well known. Tell us about some of the younger players we don't know so well.
We've got some boys from the AIS (Academy) and they are young, promising players who hopefully can develop over the season with the experienced players around them. Hopefully, they will get minutes and then some games. There is Kamill Ibrahim, a boy from Melbourne, a promising and talented winger. Eli Babalj is a big, strong striker and both boys look really good, but need some time. I hope all of them can improve over the year and create pressure for places in the team.

There is obviously going to be a big rivalry with Melbourne Victory. How much are you looking forward to being part of that?
It is great to have two teams in the one city. When I played in Italy, I played in Genoa and we had the derby between Sampdoria and Genoa. I think it's beautiful to have a derby in Melbourne because it is a great sporting city and it deserves to have such a rivalry. We're going to have this great new stadium, AAMI Park, so all the ingredients are there to have great excitement. We'll look forward to the rivalry with the Victory.

No doubt you've played at and visited many of the great stadiums around the world. How does the newly built AAMI Park compare?
It's a great, great football stadium. There are not too many others around the world that I've seen that can compare. I've seen many in Europe and this is outstanding in terms of the pitch and how close the spectators are to the pitch. The facilities in the stadium and around the stadium are great and, of course, the design is beautiful as well.

"It's great to have two teams in the one city ... we'll look forward to the rivalry."

This game between Australia and New Zealand is being played at the MCG. Have you been inside that stadium?
I've not been to the MCG yet. Of course, I have seen it from the outside and on TV, and it's a great stadium. I'll see an AFL game there soon, so I'm looking forward to seeing the stadium then.

Qantas Socceroos coach Pim Verbeek has spoken about how unusual it is to be in a place where football is not the No. 1 sporting passion. How does it feel to be in a city that lives football, but is not consumed by it?
It's strange, of course, and I already knew it when I accepted the job with the Melbourne Heart. I'm used to European football, where it is the main sport and always shown on TV, and the newspapers are full of it. But the interest isn't the same here as compared with the AFL.

STAR QUALITY John Aloisi is one of several experienced players from Sydney FC to join the Heart

How are you spending your spare time in Melbourne? Are you enjoying the city?
I'm here with my son at the moment. My wife and daughter are coming in July. But we drive around to see things. We've been to Portsea, we went to Bells Beach to watch the surfing, but otherwise we spend time in the city discovering the nice things there are in Melbourne.

Turning to the 2010 FIFA World Cup, how do you think the Qantas Socceroos are placed?
I haven't seen that much of them, except for the Indonesia game where they didn't have a full team, but I still think they have a very good squad. The only thing perhaps is that they aren't as strong as four years ago. But if everything was to come together, they could do well and that's the most important thing at the World Cup. Lots of factors need to come together at the right time but they have a good lighting factor. If Harry Kewell can get fit and the others at the end of a long European season, such as Tim Cahill, can keep themselves in the right condition, that will also be important for Australia.

Who do you think will win the 2010 FIFA World Cup?
I don't think there's a clear favourite at the moment, but there are a few teams at the same level – Argentina, Spain and Brazil – who could win. If England under Fabio Capello is also a chance because of the way Wayne Rooney has been playing and also with a great midfield. Outsiders such as Holland and Italy are also a chance. It should be a very interesting tournament.

FACT FILE

JOHN VAN'T SCHIP

BORN December 30, 1965

MELBOURNE HEART COACH Appointed 2009

PREVIOUS CLUBS AND COUNTRIES COACHED Ajax youth (1997-2000), Ajax assistant (2000-01, 2008-09), FC Twente (2001-02), Ajax B (2002-04), Netherlands assistant (2004-08), Ajax interim coach (2009)

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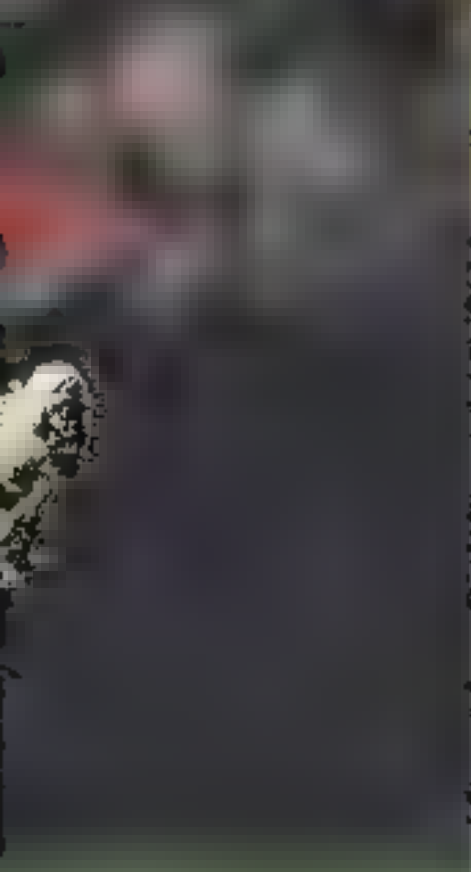

10 TO WATCH

Future Qantas Socceroos stars in the Hyundai A-League.

Danny Vukovic
CENTRAL COAST MARINERS

Only the fantastic form of Eugene Galekovic has prevented the Mariners stopper making his international debut in the past 12 months. Part of the squad at the AFC Asian Cup 2007, his future looks bright.

Shannon Cole
SYDNEY FC

The full-back has benefited greatly from the tutelage of Vitezslav Lavicka. Was rewarded with an international call-up against Indonesia in March and his debut performance showed great potential.

KEEP A KEEPER
Central Coast's Danny Vukovic is tipped to challenge for higher honours

David Williams
NORTH QUEENSLAND FURY

Lightning quick and a great finisher, the young attacker gained priceless experience from playing alongside Robbie Fowler last season.

Mathew Leckie
ADELAIDE UNITED

The electric forward burst on to the Hyundai A-League scene last season and looms as a superstar in the making.

Michael Marrone
MELBOURNE HEART

The former Adelaide defensive midfielder is a tremendous athlete and has already caught the eye of Pim Verbeek.

Adrian Leijer
MELBOURNE VICTORY

A powerful, imposing defender who also scores goals, the Victory big man has got all the attributes to be a national team regular.

Alex Brosque
SYDNEY FC

Last season, his form was inspirational for Sydney FC. The next four years will be crucial for this curvy striker's Qantas Socceroos ambitions.

Ben Kantarovski
NEWCASTLE JETS

After making his debut at just 16, the teenage prodigy has been a regular at the Jets and has class written all over him.

Mark Bridge
SYDNEY FC

His form alongside Brosque was a key ingredient in Sydney's championship success. He's fast and can finish.

Luke DeVere
BRISBANE ROAR

Powerful and reliable, the Roar youngster learned valuable lessons from playing alongside Craig Moore last season.

goals for AEK Athens in 2008. However, he spent his first Greek Super League campaign largely on the periphery and subsequently dropped off the national team radar.

Despite a successful loan move to the Greek second division last season, Burns concedes his experience has matured. Listed several European-based Aussies with Qantas Socceroos ambitions.

"In Europe, not so many of the young players are playing regularly right now. So over the next couple of years we need to step up and take the responsibility," Burns says.

"The Qantas Socceroos are only as good as their next generation, so we need to work hard in Europe to get game time."

While bench-warming at club level doesn't preclude an player from establishing himself as a national team player, it highlights the growing importance of the Hyundai A-League as a bridge to the Qantas Socceroos.

As the competition expands over the next two years – moving to 12 clubs this season and, by the end of the decade, the nation's domestic talent will be playing more football. For some, this includes valuable AFC experience playing the

As the Hyundai A-League expands over the next two years, the nation's domestic talent will be playing more football.

cream of Asia's best in the AFC Champions League, mirroring a FIFA World Cup qualifier or AFC Asian Cup environment.

The Hyundai A-League is growing into a European-style calendar. A 30-round season kicks off later this year and a 33-round campaign begins in 2010. With the introduction of mid-week fixtures, plus Hyundai A-League finals and ACL commitments, for some, this could ramp up to about 40 games.

Furthermore, and hugely important for the Hyundai A-League, has been the injection of highly respected European coaches. In a coup, former Dutch national team and Ajax Amsterdam assistant coach John van't Schip was appointed head coach of new club Melbourne Heart.

Similarly at Sydney FC there is Vitezslav Lavicka. The tactically adept and disciplined approach of the former Sparta Prague and Czech Under-21 coach has brought a fresh perspective. A Hyundai A-League championship and Premiers Plate in his first season are proof that "Vitya's" appointment was the right one.

As we witness the growth of the Hyundai A-League national youth league and other development pathways, this accumulation of European know-how has an invaluable

NEXT STEP
Aurelio Vidmar believes the domestic-based players must grab the opportunity at a higher level

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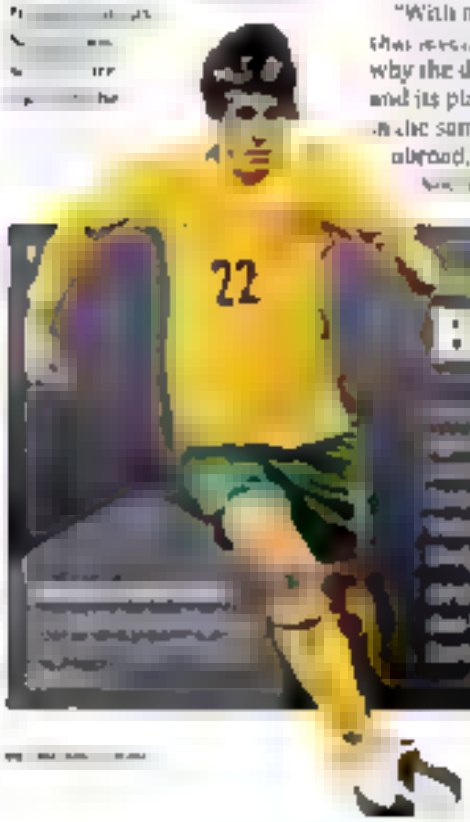
Socceroos of the future. That's the view of former Danish FIFA [illegible] United star Jesper Olsen [illegible] Melbourne He[illegible] [illegible] a league which gives the [illegible] to not only play in the Hyundai A-League but also be spotted by other countries, which will evolve the Hyundai A-League into a place where if you are good enough, you will leave the Hyundai A-League and give space to other young players coming through, which is essential to growing Australian [illegible] Adelaide United coach Aurelio [illegible] A-League offers an opportunity and the rest, he says, is up to the players. "When you [illegible] And there's probably not a lot [illegible]

What's more, highly credentialled foreign players are bringing invaluable experience to these shores. Robbie Fowler (Perth Glory), Paul Hill (Wellington Phoenix) and Carlos Hernandez at [illegible] returning Qantas Socceroos such as Jason Culina, have sprinkled their own gold dust [illegible] the competition [illegible]



dominated by players from leagues around Europe and the AFC [illegible] and we should be proud of that. But the Hyundai A-League is [illegible] increasingly professional [illegible] geographically situated much closer to Australia's FIFA World [illegible]

And with the international calendar becoming more congested, we've already seen Hyundai A-League players representing Australia in AFC Asian Cup qualifiers. The AFC Asian Cup 2011 in January may feature a strong Hyundai A-League presence.

"With more exposure at [illegible] why the domestic competition and its players cannot be seen in the same light as others abroad," adds former Qantas [illegible]

Olsen agrees and notes that the gap between local and overseas-based players is fast closing through the improved standards of the Hyundai A-League.

[illegible] Premier League), for example [illegible] having the chance to really shine and potentially make a case for Socceroo selection," he says.

"Tommy Oar is an example [illegible] short time in the A-League [illegible] the ability to show that the [illegible] footballer plays at that level that you can really decide whether [illegible] greats such as Eddie Krncevic, David Mitchell and Charlie Yankos past on the Qantas [illegible] squad featuring the likes of Robbie Slater, Aurelio Vidmar and Alex Tobin evolved into [illegible] served the country so well in the first 10 years of [illegible]

Moore, Kewell, Neill and [illegible] have written a glorious chapter in national team history – a story that began [illegible] played its first international coincidentally against tonight's opponent, New Zealand.

"This generation of Qantas Socceroos has probably been the best. Ever. In history," adds Burns. "So it's a big responsibility and big shoes to fill.

That said, you get the feeling the next generation will relish [illegible]

Bright Future

[illegible]

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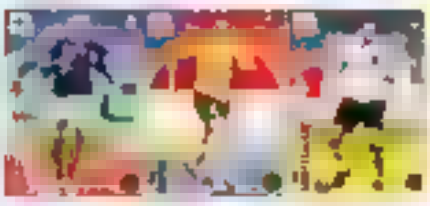
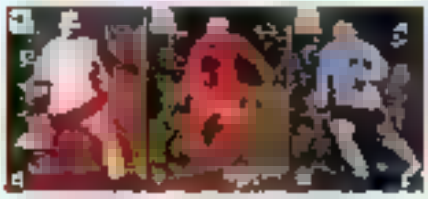


25 Star players metallized cards.



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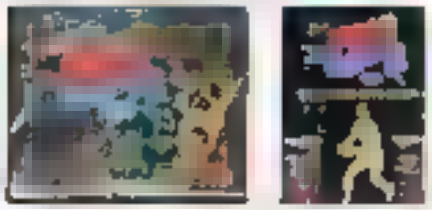

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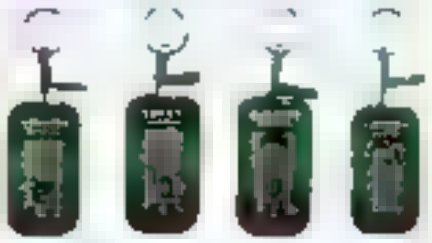

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Call the Australian players earning [illegible] the story of Mark [illegible] and the victory over reigning [illegible] Wolfsburg. Sandwiched in [illegible] come-from-behind 5-4 win [illegible] and Schwarzer was beaten just once in [illegible] was no [illegible] ending for the [illegible]

TARGET MAN

[illegible]

Australian No. 1, as the Cottagers suffered a cruel lost [illegible] with Diego Forlan scoring the [illegible] In England. At Blackburn, [illegible] injury concerns to return to [illegible]

Schwarzer was named the Premiership Player of the Month for February

Brett Emerton also enjoyed the [illegible] mid-table finish. [illegible] figure in Everton's surge up the table in the second half [illegible] Garcia, whose Hull side was relegated after two seasons [illegible] in a relegation scrap, with Crystal Palace in the English [illegible] administration, the South [illegible] Sheffield Wednesday after drawing with the Owls on the final day of the season.

In League One, Patrick Kisnorbo's 2010 FIFA World [illegible] the Leeds defender injured [illegible] substitute, but then ruptured [illegible] following week. Socceroos fans, will have their [illegible] last month in a [illegible] over Diyarbakirspor [illegible] the Turkish giant qualified for [illegible]

Much like Kewell, Mark Bresciano's 2009/10 domestic [illegible] a lofty fifth in Serie A, the classy midfielder spent long [illegible] to training in April. It was announced in late March that [illegible]

FAIRYTALE END

[illegible] with Fulham in the [illegible]

Dutch Invasion

ACTION REPLAY

AUSTRALIA

QANTAS SOCCEROOS vs. Indonesia

Fielding a team mainly of home-based players, the Qantas Socceroos were rarely troubled in a 1-0 win against Indonesia that ensured their qualification for the AFC Asian Cup 2011. BY JOHN MURRAY

Mark Milligan chose the perfect time to score his first international goal as the Qantas Socceroos sealed their spot at the AFC Asian Cup 2011 with victory over Indonesia.

In truth, the result was far more comfortable than it appeared on paper as the dominant Australians created a string of chances particularly in the second half only to be denied by an inspired Markus Haroun Rukiuna in goal and their own poor finishing.

In contrast, the Indonesians, who were already out of the hunt for qualification from Group B, conjured few openings. Benny Dollo's team had managed only three goals in five previous qualifiers and drew another blank as the Qantas Socceroos dominated possession.

Coach Pim Verbeek named eight Hyundai A-League players in his starting line up, captained by Gold Coast United skipper Jason Culina, with Luke Wilkshire, Josh Kennedy and Milligan representing the foreign-based contingent. And it was the domestic players who caught the eye in front of the 20,422 crowd at Suncorp Stadium, with debutants Shannon Cole and Tommy Oar impressing in their first outings.

On a wet night in Brisbane Australia made a sluggish start before it slowly mastered the conditions and kept hold of the ball. Together with Culina, Perth Glory captain Jacob Burns was influential in the middle of the park, tidying up possession and breaking up any Indonesian forays forward.

The pressure paid off in the 42nd minute when Milligan made the crucial breakthrough. The Hull United defender latched on to Wilkshire's unwrapping free kick from the edge of the penalty area, shouldering the ball past Rukiuna. It looped on to the crossbar but Milligan was quickest to react to the rebound, turning sharply on to his left foot to find the net.

Not content with one goal, the Qantas Socceroos almost doubled their advantage on the stroke of half-time when Rukiuna produced a smart reflex save to keep out Simon Colosimo's header.

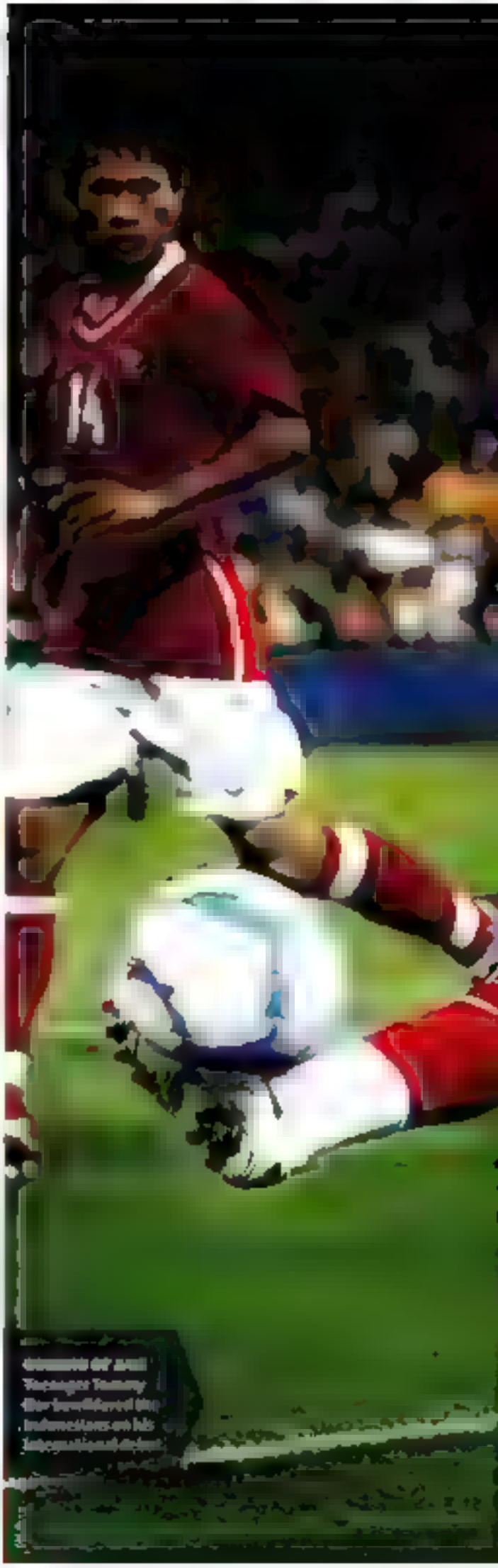
If anything, Australia became more dominant in the second half, frequently entering the Indonesian penalty area but without finding the crucial second goal. Kennedy had a couple of decent headed chances, while Culina tested Rukiuna with several long range efforts.

Our grew in confidence as the game went on, the teenage winger regularly beating his man with speed and skill and delivering several dangerous crosses. Matt McKay also made a telling impact as a second half substitute for Nate Sherkovski, helping the Qantas Socceroos close out the match.

With Oman and Kuwait sharing the spoils in Muscat, Australia finished first in Group B, two points above the Kuwaitis. The Omanis, a further point behind, missed out on qualification.

SUNCORP STADIUM, BRISBANE, MARCH 3, 2009

Australia	1 (Milligan 42')
Indonesia	0



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21

RESULTS & FIXTURES

Qantas Socceroos' results and fixtures until the end of the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

Indonesia 0
Australia 0
Jakarta
January 28, 2009

Australia 0
Kuwait 1
Canberra Stadium, Canberra
March 5, 2009

Australia 1
Oman 0
Etihad Stadium, Melbourne
October 14, 2009

Oman 1
Australia 1
Muscat
November 14, 2009

Kuwait 2
Australia 2
Kuwait City
January 6, 2010

Australia 1
Indonesia 0
Suncorp Stadium, Brisbane
March 3, 2010

Japan 0
Australia 0
Yokohama
February 11, 2009

Australia 2
Uzbekistan 0
ANZ Stadium, Sydney
April 1, 2009

Qatar 0
Australia 0
Doha
June 6, 2009

Australia 2
Bahrain 0
ANZ Stadium, Sydney
June 10, 2009

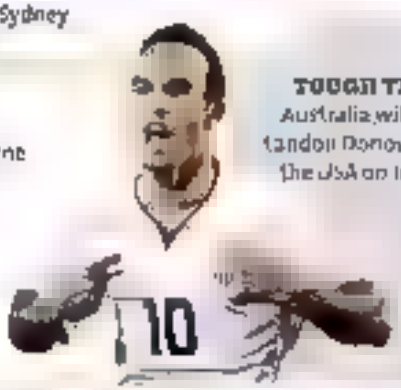
Australia 2
Japan 1
MCG, Melbourne
June 17, 2009

Germany v Australia
Durban, South Africa
June 14, 2010

Ghana v Australia
Rustenburg, South Africa
June 20, 2010

Australia v Serbia
Nelspruit, South Africa
June 24, 2010

Note: Dates according to Australia Eastern Standard Time. The round of 16 will begin on June 27, 2010



TOUGH TEST
Australia will face Landon Donovan and the USA on June 5

Republic of Ireland 0
Australia 3
Limerick
August 12, 2009

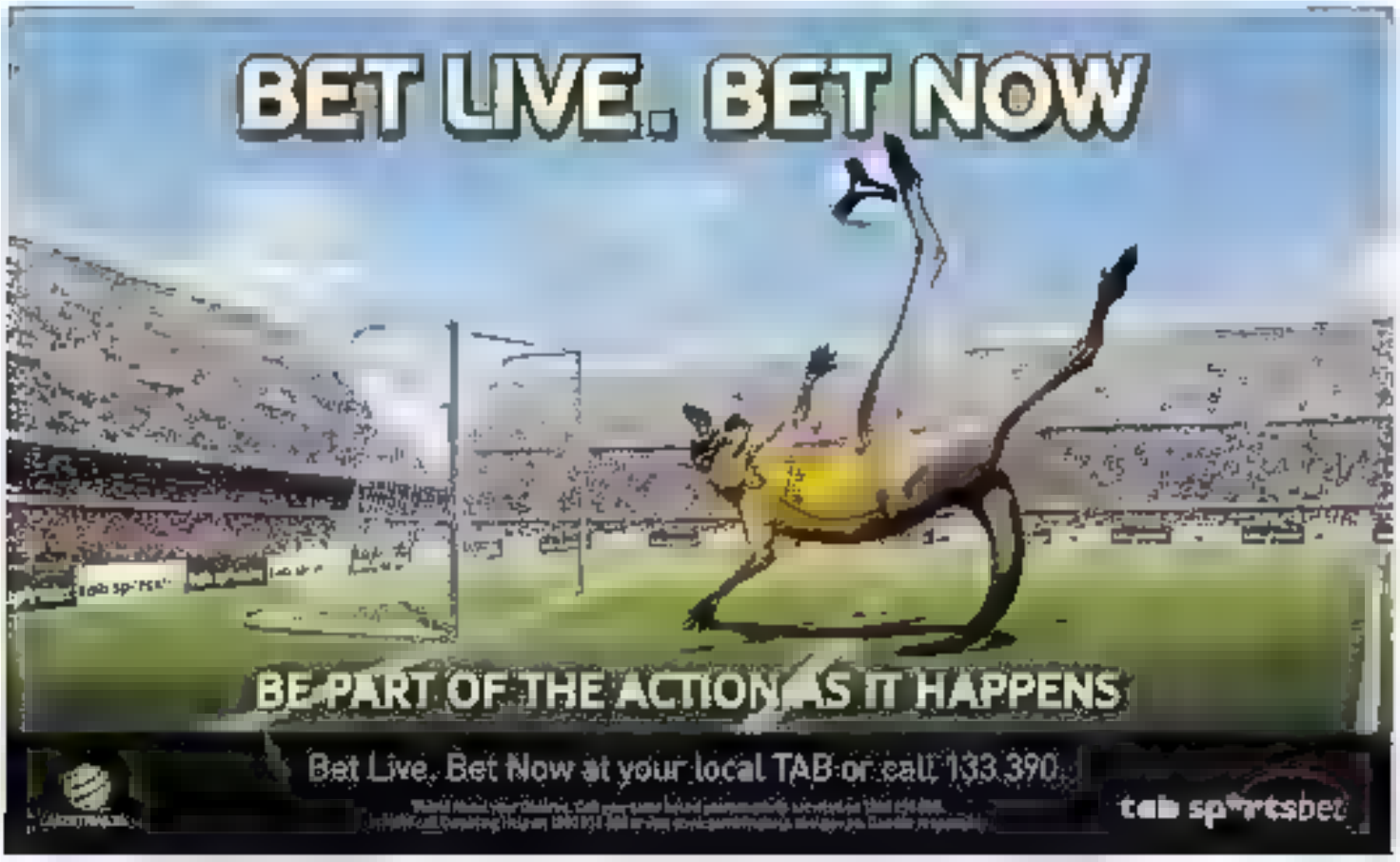
Korea Republic 3
Australia 1
Seoul
September 5, 2009

Australia 0
Netherlands 0
Sydney Football Stadium
October 10, 2009

Australia v New Zealand
MCG, Melbourne
May 24, 2010

Australia v Denmark
Roodepoort, South Africa
June 1, 2010

Australia v USA
Roodepoort, South Africa
June 5, 2010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- [illegible]
- [illegible]
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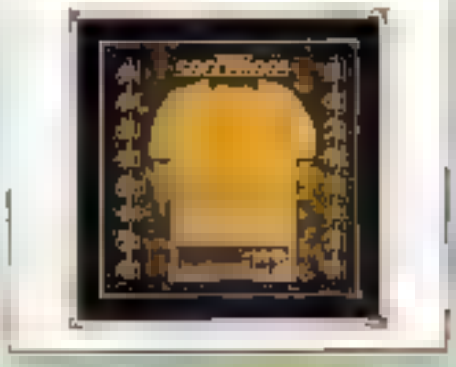

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ON THE SPOT

Test your knowledge and skills

Reckon you know a thing or two about the Qantas Socceroos? Take this quiz and all will be revealed.

1 How many games did Eugene Galekovic play in the AFC Asian Cup 2011 qualifiers?
A. Two
B. Three
C. Four

2 Who missed a penalty for Sydney FC against Melbourne Victory in the Hyundai A-League 2009/10 Grand Final?
A. Shannon Cole
B. Simon Colosimo
C. Hayden Foxe

3 Which club will John Aloisi play for in the Hyundai A-League 2010/11 season?
A. Sydney FC
B. Central Coast Mariners
C. Melbourne Heart

4 Shane Lowry was on loan to Leeds from which English Premiership club last season?
A. Aston Villa
B. Liverpool
C. Everton

QUIZ TIES
Which Italian club did Mark Bresciano first play for?

5 Against which country did Harry Kewell last score for Australia?
A. Bahrain
B. Uzbekistan
C. Qatar

6 Who captained the Qantas Socceroos against Indonesia in March?
A. Josh Kennedy
B. Jacob Burns
C. Jason Culina

7 How many Qantas Socceroos internationals play for Middlesbrough in the English Championship?
A. Two
B. Three
C. Four

8 Where was the last international between Australia and New Zealand held in England in 2005?
A. Upton Park
B. Wembley
C. Craven Cottage

9 Which nation beat the Qantas Socceroos at the MCG in 2007?
A. Argentina
B. Uruguay
C. Denmark

10 From which Dutch club did Brett Emerton join Blackburn in 2003?
A. PSV Eindhoven
B. Feyenoord
C. FC Twente

11 Which nation won the AFC Asian Cup 2007, having beaten Australia in the group stages?
A. Iran
B. Iraq
C. Saudi Arabia

12 Which Qantas Socceroo scored for Wellington Phoenix in its Hyundai A-League preliminary final loss to Sydney FC?
A. Jim McKain
B. Paul Hill
C. Andrew Durante

13 What nationality is Pim Verbeek's coaching assistant Henk Duut?
A. Swedish
B. Dutch
C. German

14 For which team did Craig Johnston score in the 1986 FA Cup final?
A. Liverpool
B. Everton
C. Arsenal

15 Which club does Danny Invincible play for in the Scottish Premier League?
A. Celtic
B. Dundee United
C. Kilmarnock

16 From which Serie A club did Mark Bresciano join Palermo in 2006?
A. Empoli
B. Inter Milan
C. Parma

17 Who scored Australia's first goal in the FIFA World Cup finals?
A. Craig Moore
B. Tim Cahill
C. Mark Viduka

18 Who was Australia's captain in the 1974 FIFA World Cup?
A. Johnny Warren
B. Jack Reilly
C. Peter Wilson

19 Name the first English club Mark Schwarzer played for.
A. Bradford
B. Middlesbrough
C. Swindon

20 Who scored two goals for the Qantas Socceroos the last time they played Germany in 2005?
A. John Aloisi
B. Harry Kewell
C. Mark Viduka

BY THE STATS

Qantas Socceroos' statistics.

6 losses for Australia to Bahrain, one of its opponents in the AFC Asian Cup 2011

1 goal scored by Mark Milligan for the Qantas Socceroos, against Indonesia in March

1 Australian named Player of the Month in the history of the English Premiership after Fulham's Mark Schwarzer won the award in February

2 debutants for Australia against Indonesia: Shannon Cole and Tommy Oar

4 goals conceded by the Qantas Socceroos in the AFC Asian Cup 2011 qualifiers

5 different goalscorers in the AFC Asian Cup 2011 qualifiers (Luke Wilkshire was the only player to score twice).

6 places between the USA (14) and Australia (20) in the latest FIFA world rankings (the nations will play a friendly on June 5)

6 goals scored by Josh Kennedy for the Qantas Socceroos – all of them with his head.

10 goals scored by Tim Cahill for Everton in the 2009/10 season.

10 goals scored by Australia against New Zealand when the countries met in 1936.

11 points for the Qantas Socceroos in their AFC Asian Cup 2011 qualifying group.

13 years difference between teammates Mark Schwarzer (37) and Tommy Oar (18)

23 shots at goal – on target – by Australia against Indonesia in the final AFC Asian Cup 2011 qualifier

27 overseas-based players named in the Qantas Socceroos squad to face New Zealand

34 goals scored by the Qantas Socceroos under Pim Verbeek, an average of 1.26 a game

54 years since Australia last played India. Its first opponent in the AFC Asian Cup 2011.

62 internationals played between Australia and New Zealand

SIX OF THE BEST
Josh Kennedy has scored six times for Australia – all with his head.

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FINAL WHISTLE

National Pride

International football serves up an experience for fans that many other sports cannot offer. BY MICHAEL LYNCH

An Ashes series every two years plus a limited-overs World Cup every four, a rugby World Cup at the same interval, and a rather lopsided rugby league World Cup give fans of cricket and both rugby codes a true – if rather limited – sense of the international dimension of their sports.

OK, the Australian representatives in those sports also play other regular international fixtures, but they tend to be against the same old opponents on regular rotation.

Only football gives Australians the chance to test themselves against the whole world – in the FIFA World Cup, of course, but also at regular intervals against the best of their regional opponents in the AFC Asian Cup.

And football gives Australian clubs an opportunity which teams in the other sports rarely get – to measure themselves against the best in regional and, ultimately, world competition.

Yes, cricket has introduced its Champions League Twenty20 club competition, but it is contested more by state and regional representatives than club teams, and has not been around long enough to capture the public imagination.

It can't, therefore, be compared to a tournament like the AFC Champions League in which the best clubs from this country pit themselves against quality opponents throughout Asia and the Middle East in a long and gruelling competition that runs from March to November. It's also worth noting the tournament is played at the same time as domestic fixtures, increasing the pressure on clubs to perform at the highest level year round.

Australians truly grasped the concept of international football during the 2006 FIFA World Cup, that roller-coaster ride which took in the nerve-jangling win over Japan, the honourable defeat to Brazil, the dramatic, qualification-clinching draw with Croatia, and the "we wuz robbed" finale of the round of 16 defeat to Italy in Kaiserslautern.

MAGIC MOMENT Harry Kewell's 2006 goal against Croatia united Australians at home and abroad.

Football gives fans the chance to stretch their interest far and wide.

There had been tantalising opportunities for the sport to break through into the collective national consciousness in the past – the collective national grief at the defeat by Iran in 1997, the disappointment of the 3-0 loss to Uruguay in Montevideo in 2001 after the 1-0 win in Melbourne, and the unalloyed joy and euphoria unleashed after John Aloisi's winning penalty against the same opponent in 2005 quickly come to mind.

While it might not be surprising that thousands made the trip to Germany to watch the Qantas Socceroos cover themselves in glory (after all, this country has a reputation for producing intrepid travellers), even more impressive was the numbers that got out and about in public places at home to watch the games together.

In Melbourne's Federation Square, despite the chill of the June winter nights and early mornings, as many as 17,000 fans came out in force to barrack for their country and experience the collective joy and despair, happiness and grief that football delivers in equal measure.

They realised, as supporters in Europe, South America and other football-crazy corners of the globe have done for generations, that sharing the experience is a vital component of the enjoyment, and that international competition brings a level of engagement which supporting your team in a domestic league rarely delivers. With the games in South Africa being played in similar timeslots this year, more of the same is on the cards.

As well as plugging fans into a wider world – I have to admit that as a schoolboy much of my European geography was learned following the progress of English teams in the European Cup and UEFA Cup competitions during the late 1960s and 1970s – football can also broaden the mind.

Iraq's 3-1 victory over the Qantas Socceroos in the group phase of the AFC Asian Cup 2007, and the war-torn nation's subsequent fairytale victory in the final over Saudi Arabia, produced probably the best PR the country has had – as long as the past 30 years.

The footage of Iraqi supporters celebrating wildly would also have made Australians aware that Iraq is a country with people like those everywhere else, people who barrack for their team and share the hopes and dreams and disappointments that football can deliver – as we all do.

Tonight's game is a timely renewal of what is Australia's greatest sporting rivalry, with our close neighbour, New Zealand. While that rivalry may be better developed in rugby, cricket, horse racing and netball, the competition between the Qantas Socceroos and the All Whites goes back a long way.

Football gives fans the chance to stretch their interest far and wide but, occasionally, the most compelling contest is the one which makes us look closer to home. Let's hope that is the case tonight, before we all become true internationalists once more in the next few weeks.

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